

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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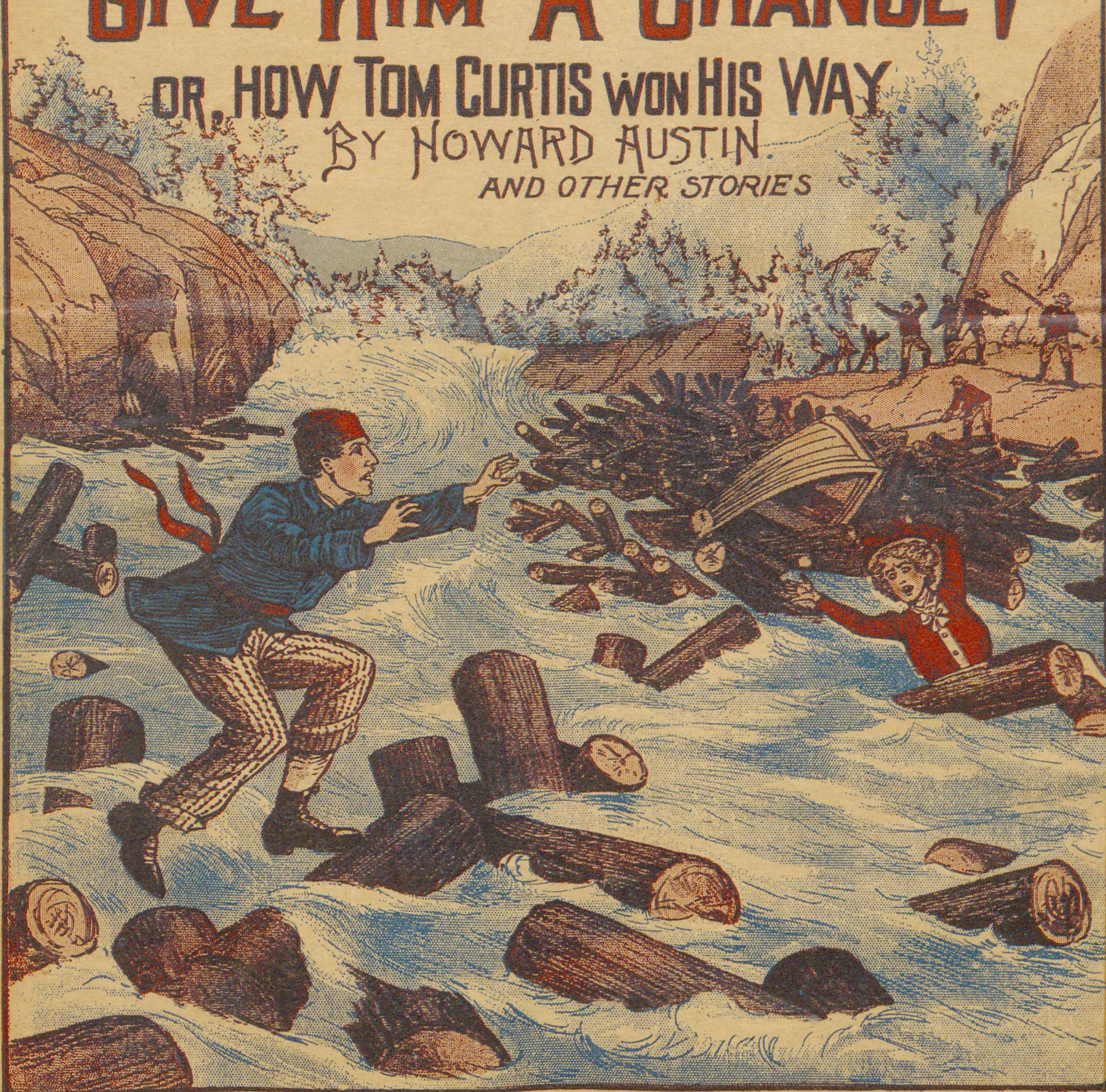
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NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 26, 1917.

Price SIX Cents.

GIVE HIM A CHANCE!

OR, HOW TOM CURTIS WON HIS WAY
BY HOWARD AUSTIN.
AND OTHER STORIES



Tom sprang out upon the fearful, whirling mass of logs. On and on he went, gradually drawing nearer to the girl, who was struggling for life amid the moving logs.

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GIVE HIM A CHANCE

—OR—

HOW TOM CURTIS WON HIS WAY

By HOWARD AUSTIN

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF THE POORHOUSE.

"Tom, come here, my boy, quickly. I want to tell you something of great importance to you. I feel sure that my end is coming, and I cannot die in peace and retain the secret longer."

"Mother!" exclaimed Tom Curtis, with a quivering cry of agony. "You must not—you shall not die!"

The handsome-featured youth of eighteen, handsome in spite of the miserable clothes which adorned his shapely young form, crept nearer the bedside. The last rays of the departing sun were glinting through the battered panes of the window. It was a small, wretchedly-furnished room, yet as Oscar Bayles, the poor farm keeper averred:

"It is good enough for paupers. They're of no account, anyway, no more nor sheep or hogs."

This was the uncharitable opinion of Oscar Bayles, which, let us hope, is not shared by the world at large. The woman reclining upon the scantily covered bed was past the age of forty, and was dying, it was plain enough to see.

Widow Curtis, as she had been known in Woodvale, was a woman of many excellent qualities, but reticent in manners. This was no doubt why she was now lacking in sympathy and kindly words of friends in this her dying hour.

She had lived in an obscure part of the town, seldom commingling with the townspeople. Her health failing her, she was unable to pay the rent of her house, and it being on the eve of very dull times, Tom was unable to find work. So it happened that one day Bayles, the poorhouse keeper, was obliged to go over and take her to the refuge afforded paupers of the lowest class. It was a terrible humiliation to Ann Curtis to know that she was destined to die in the poorhouse.

"My boy," said the dying woman, gazing intently into Tom's face, "I have tried to do well by you. Have I not always been a kind mother to you?"

"Oh, mother!" cried Tom, in anguished tones. "Of course you have. You must not die and leave me now."

She gazed wistfully and tenderly into his face. Then shook her head slowly and sadly.

"Ah, it was wrong, all wrong!" she murmured in a way which puzzled Tom. "I do not deserve your love, Tom. I am not worthy of it."

"Why, mother!" began the youth.

"Stop! It is not right that you should call me mother. Listen, Tom, as I hope soon to face my Maker, I am not your real mother."

Words cannot depict the effect of this statement upon Tom Curtis. It was like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. He could not believe his senses. His head swam and he was sick and faint.

"Why, my mother, what can you mean?" he gasped.

"No, Tom. I am not your real mother," continued Mrs. Curtis, with a strong effort to steady her voice. "Oh, heavens! give me strength to tell you the story. Tom, your parents—were—oh—I strangle—help—ah—"

All ended in a gurgling gasp. Tom saw her form twitch convulsively, felt that he was in the presence of death and sprang up with a wild, awful cry of terror.

He rushed to the door of the room and flung it open, crying:

"Oh, help! help! Mother is dying! Come, quick!"

Almost instantly a burly form appeared in the doorway and a coarse voice said gruffly:

"Shut up yer caterwauling, yonker. Eh—I reckon it's so," he continued, as his gaze went to the form on the bed, now white and rigid in death.

Oscar Bayles, the poorhouse keeper, took a step forward and placed a hand on the woman's brow.

"She's kicked the bucket," he said coarsely. "Well, another one out of the way. Come, youngster, git out of here. Yer mother's no use to yer any longer."

Bayles pulled a sheet over the dead woman's face and drove Tom from the room. The next day Ann Curtis was laid in a pauper's grave.

Tom's grief was great, but he found little sympathy; only jeers and frowns from Bayles. The future looked black and uncertain to him. He was determined to start out for himself in the world, and as chance had it, a man called at the poor-farm that very day.

"Ye see, Bayles, I want a boy to do my work," declared the man, who was a farmer of the penurious, grinding stamp. "An' he can't fool about it, nuther. I've twenty cows an' four yoke of oxen, an' I want 'em fed an' cared fer every day. Then Malviny wants her woodpile kept pooty high, see? Hain't ye got jest what I want?"

Bayles slapped his hands forcibly together.

"Yes, I hev!" he cried coarsely. "Hey, you, Tom Curtis, come out yer."

Tom had been all the while inside the house and now came out. He glanced at the applicant for a working boy, and saw a man of most unprepossessing features. At once his dislike was instinctive.

Yet he was powerless to avert his fate, and the result was that he rode home that night with farmer Billy Hastings.

All the way home Hastings did not deign to speak. But when they drove into the miserable-looking farmyard at last, Tom's employer threw down the reins and said peremptorily:

"There! Take that hoss, rub him down, and put him in his stall. Giv' him some oats, an' then I'll cum out and show ye what part of the haymow ye kin sleep in."

Hastings entered the house, where Tom presently heard him arguing lustily with a woman, undoubtedly his wife, whose tongue was like a trip-hammer on a steel anvil.

Tom Curtis was by no means favorably impressed with this disposition of his fortunes. But he was very ignorant of the world outside, and concluded that he would have to endure rough treatment for a time, and to make the best of it.

After Hastings had appeared and made him feed the cattle, clean out the barn and milk a dozen cows, besides minor jobs, too numerous to mention, Tom was glad at the late hour of ten o'clock to crawl into that part of the haymow

specified by Hastings and go to sleep. He was nigh exhausted, and so bleak and drear was the outlook that he actually gave way to sobs of despair.

However, when morning came he was up early and had cared for the live stock, and was hard at work when Hastings came out.

The farmer was in an irritable mood, and not disposed to praise his new "help" for the handsome manner in which he had done his work. Instead, he treated Tom to a volley of curses, and the youth was happy enough when Hastings hitched up his sorrel mare and drove away to attend town meeting.

It was a late hour in the morning, and Tom was nigh famished, when "Malviny," the scolding wife of his employer, yelled harshly out at the door:

"Cum, thar, lazy bones, stir your stumps and come inter breakfast. Lively, now, or ye won't git nuthin'!"

Tom's whole spirit was fired with resentment and an angry retort was upon his lips for the unkind words. But he prudently checked his speech and went meekly into the farmhouse kitchen. Upon a dingy, crumb-strewn table, devoid of cloth, was a dry loaf of bread, some hardtack and moldy cheese.

It was hardly substantial enough fare for a working boy like Tom Curtis, but he made a brave attempt to eat. The hardtack and cheese he managed to masticate, but the bread was far beyond him.

With a great lump in his throat, Tom arose and started to leave the kitchen. But the woman turned, and, in a snarling way, cried:

"Hey, there, numbskull! Didn't I tell ye to fetch in an armful of wood? Stir yer stumps, ye beggar!"

This was more than Tom could stand. He preserved his temper, however, but quietly replied:

"Pardon me, but I did not hear you tell me to bring in the wood. Neither am I a beggar."

Tom spoke with dignity, but his blue eyes blazed. The effect upon the virago was beyond description. It was like heaping fuel on a blazing fire. Had Tom been wise he would have kept silence, for this was the very opportunity the woman craved. She turned upon him like a tigress.

"What! ye unmannerly puppy! Ye dare to talk back to me, ye poorhouse brat! I'll teach ye better than that. So this is the thanks we git for our charity in takin' ye in an' givin' ye a comf'table home? As I live, I'll tell Hastings to cowhide ye when he gits home from town meeting."

A perfect torrent of abusive language escaped the virago's lips, and Tom Curtis was treated to such abuse as he had never experienced before in his life. In dismay and utter desperation he retreated to the barn.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, mopping the cold perspiration from his brow. "I can't stand this. I'll not stay here another day, if I starve for it. I'll take to the woods and live on berries and wild game the rest of my life before I stay here. Old Hastings is bad enough, but his wife is unendurable. There is a place in this wide world for me somewhere, but it certainly is not here."

Tom's mind was fully made up. He was determined to make no explanation or apology to his employers, but to unceremoniously take his departure.

Thus decided, he was about to pick up his few effects when an astounding thing happened. There was a sudden rustling in the hay, and suddenly down from the mow slid a man clad in a nondescript garb, with heavy, tangled beard and wild eyes. He gave one look at Tom and then dashed out of the barn like one pursued by demons.

"A tramp!" gasped Tom. "And he must have slept here last night, and not far from me. Ah!"

He gave a quick, gasping cry. Suddenly he caught sight of a thin, curling wreath of smoke coming from the mow. The next moment a red flame shot up and ran through the dry hay like magic.

A fearful horror overwhelmed Tom Curtis. A great, wild cry of horror escaped his lips.

"Why, the hay is on fire!" he cried. "Help! Come quick, somebody! Fire! Fire! The barn is afire!"

There was the sudden rattling of wheels outside, and the next moment a man came bounding into the barn.

It was Hastings, just returned, and he had heard Tom's cry. It required but a glance for him to see that the barn was beyond all possible redemption. The expression upon his face was frightful to look upon.

He turned upon Tom with the fury of a maniac and shrieked:

"Did you set the hay afire, ye limb of Satan? Tell me the truth, or I'll kill ye!"

"No, no!" cried Tom earnestly. "It was a tramp, and he just ran out of here as I came in."

"That's a lie!" piped a shrill voice in Tom's rear. "We're ruined, an' all on account of takin' in this poorhouse brat! I seen him fire the hay with my own eyes!"

Dazed, beyond all description, Tom turned to refute this lying charge made by the virago; but before he could utter a word in denial the brutal Hastings had launched a fearful blow at him with the butt of his heavy whip.

The blow took Tom just over the temple, and stretched him unconscious upon the floor of the burning barn.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER ARREST.

Hastings stood quivering with brutal passion over the prostrate form of the orphan boy and would have dealt him another blow but for his wife, who clutched his arm and screeched shrilly:

"Don't kill him, Bill. Ye'll hang for it if ye do. Let him burn up if ye want to, but don't kill him that a-way."

"Durn him, I'd like to!" gritted the brute. Then his manner relaxed and he rejoined:

"I dunno but I hev killed him already, Malviny. Curse it, thar comes some of the neighbors an' Constable Jerry Powers. It won't do to leave him in here to burn, Malviny. Let's drag him out."

It was true that across the fields a number of people were coming at full speed, having been attracted by the flame and smoke from the burning barn.

The fire had spread like a tornado. Great mountains of smoke and flame were bursting upward through the roof. It was certain that in a very short space of time the barn would be a smoldering heap of ruins.

The Hastings had just time to drag Tom's unconscious form out of the barn when the crowd came. Great excitement ensued. A thousand questions were showered upon Hastings and his wife, and all gazed wonderingly at Tom's unconscious form.

"Why, ther facts in ther case air jest this," declared Hastings, falsely: "Ye see, we hev jest taken this young feller, out of kindness, from the poorhouse an' gin him a home in our fambly. A few minutes ago he got mad at Malviny 'cause she asked him perlately to saw some wood fer her, an' out of revenge he jest came out yere and tossed a match inter the hay. It's a mighty hard loss fer me, poor man as I am."

A murmur went through the crowd, of mingled indignation and disapproval.

"Ye oughter lynch the scoundrel!"

"I'm sorry fer ye, Bill."

"Run him in!"

"Send him to prison!"

This last exclamation seemed to touch the right chord in Hastings' rancorous breast. He was smarting with rage and disappointment at the loss of his barn, and though his wife knew well enough that Tom was innocent, there was the doubt as to whether the real offender could be caught; also there was the desire to wreak vengeance upon somebody, and Tom was the nearest and most convenient object. Accordingly, the precious pair lit upon our hero with the avidity of hawks upon a helpless rabbit.

"Why, in course, I'll have the law on him!" blustered Hastings. "It's a State's prison offense, I reckon. Of course, Jerry Powers, ye're willing to do yer duty?"

"In course, Bill," said the constable, coming forward. "Ye kin safely swear that ye see him fire the barn?"

"Yes, I kin!" unblushingly replied Hastings.

"Then I arrest him in the name of the law!"

Powers placed a hand upon Tom's shoulder. It chanced that the orphan boy had regained his senses at that moment and heard the last declaration of Hastings.

His head swam and blood dripped from the wound over his temple, but he managed to partly rise and cried:

"It is false. I did not fire the barn. You speak that which is untrue."

"Hear the young villain lie!" cried Mrs. Hastings, shrilly. "I know it's a lie 'cause I seen him set the fire!"

"It is false!" began Tom, indignantly.

But Jerry Powers seized him roughly by the shoulder and jerked him to his feet.

"No more talk, ye young rascal!" he said, roughly. "Ye are under arrest now. The evidence is ag'in ye, an' if ye've anything to say, ye'd better say it in court an' not here!"

Tom realized the wisdom of this latter assertion and said no more. To him his position was one of fearful sort. In the hands of the law, with two such unprincipled people as the Hastingses to swear against him, there seemed little doubt but that he would be sent to prison for an offense of which he was not guilty.

The very thought of being placed behind bars was an awful one to Tom Curtis. It seemed to him a disgrace which would adhere to him through life. He would forever after be classed among criminals. The thought was more than he could bear, and he seemed likely to go mad.

He was held in custody by the constable until a horse and covered wagon could be procured. By this time the barn was nothing but a smoldering heap of ruins.

"Come, Bill Hastings!" exclaimed Powers. "Git in an' come along with me. Ye'll have to swear out the complaint, ye know."

Tom was bound hand and foot and thrown into the bottom of the wagon. Then his captors mounted the seat and amid the jeers of the crowd the young prisoner was driven away.

Darkness was coming on rapidly. It was fully fifteen miles to the county seat, where was the jail, and the horse was slow.

The wagon jolted along painfully to Tom, bound as he was. Hastings and Powers sat upon the seat chatting busily, and as unmindful of the existence of poor Tom as if he had been a calf going to the slaughter pen.

To attempt to describe the sensations experienced by Tom Curtis as he lay suffering in the bottom of the jolting wagon would be quite impossible. He was wholly the victim of despair.

But after a time a sort of desperation seized him. Why should he submit to such injustice? He realized that his case was a hopeless one if brought before the magistrate.

Self-preservation is rightly the first law of nature. Tom seized upon an idea which suddenly presented itself to him with the same avidity that a drowning man will clutch at a straw. The idea was—escape!

But how could it be effected?

Tom's mind was one fertile in expedients. He considered and rejected several plans. In the meanwhile he kept at work trying to loosen his bonds.

It chanced that they were of a flexible sort, being nothing but common, cheap, hempen rope and stretched vastly with pressure. Tom exerted all his strength and managed to writhen one hand free. The rest was easy.

To untie the knots and free his feet was the next move. He lay in the bottom of the wagon quietly for some while after this.

He was intensely excited. His heart beat so loudly that he feared it would be heard by his captors. The desire for liberty was a most powerful one.

He did not stop to think that the shadow of the law was over him and would pursue him. The world was wide, and somewhere there must be a chance for him.

His mind was concentrated wholly upon that one mad impulse. He waited for what he believed to be a favorable moment, and then slid noiselessly to the rear of the wagon and dropped out upon the ground.

All unconscious of this move upon Tom's part, the two men drove on. Tom Curtis stood for a moment thrilled with the transport of his suddenly acquired liberty.

Then he realized the danger of remaining in the vicinity. A road diverged to the left. He took it and kept on with all speed.

For miles he sped on at a rapid walk. Then the first gray streaks of dawn began to appear. How many miles he had traveled he knew not.

Until near the hour of noon he walked on steadily. He had shunned all habitations thus far.

But now a deadly faintness, the outcome of hunger, seized him. He drew near to a cozy-looking farmhouse and resolved to apply there for food.

A woman of comely appearance sat upon a rear porch, engaged in knitting. Tom approached her respectfully and said:

"If you please, madam, I would like to ask if you have any work you would like done, for which you would render pay in food. I will gladly do it, as I am very hungry and have no money."

Tom's frank manner and honest face carried the point.

"Well," replied the woman slowly, "I don't know much about the work outside. The men folks are away. But you're welcome to come in and have something to eat."

"No," replied Tom, decidedly. "I am not begging. I must work and pay for what food I eat."

The woman appeared surprised.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "That ain't much like the most of 'em that come along here. However, if you insist, you may saw up that pile of wood. But you look faint, and you had better eat first."

"Which I will gladly do," replied Tom, eagerly. "If you will trust to my promise to saw the wood."

"I will risk it," she replied with a laugh.

Soon Tom was seated at the kitchen table, with a homely but appetizing meal spread before him. He partook of it with zest.

His hostess sat near, reading a paper. She was of that inquisitive type who are ever thirsting for news. Therefore, it was not strange that she should make some conversation with the young traveler.

"Was it not a strange thing how that young criminal escaped from Jerry Powers, the constable, and Bill Hastings last night? I mean the young fellow that set fire to Hastings' barn out of spite."

Tom gave a mighty start.

"Goodness! has the news traveled so fast?" he exclaimed, unguardedly.

"Why, here's half a column in the Woodvale Examiner," replied the housekeeper. "Quite a sensational report, too. Did ye come by the spot on your way?"

Tom nearly choked with a mouthful of food such a start did the question give him. But he quickly composed himself as he reflected that it was by no means probable that the woman suspected him.

"I think I did!" he replied. "In fact, I witnessed the fire."

"Law sakes! ye don't say!" exclaimed the farmer's wife all agog with interest. "I reckon they'll catch the young fellow that set it afire, an' it'll go right hard wi' him."

Tom dropped his knife and sat bolt upright. For his life he could not have helped defending his honor at that moment.

"Madam," he said, forcibly, "that was rank injustice! That young man was not guilty of that deed."

The farmer's wife looked surprised.

"Sho!" she exclaimed. "Are you sure of that?"

"I am."

"But did ye know the lad?"

"Yes," replied Tom. "I knew him well. In fact, no other person living could have known him so well. I don't know that there is any need of my concealing the fact longer. I have never done anything in my life to be ashamed of. Madam, I am Tom Curtis, the young fellow charged with setting fire to Bill Hastings' barn."

The effect of this upon the woman was singular. Not a muscle of her face changed, and she regarded Tom steadily.

"Sho!" she rejoined. "You don't look like that kind of a chap. I don't believe ye ever did it."

"Thank you!" replied Tom, with a flush of joy. "I am glad to know that you judge me rightly."

"Well, ye see, I know Bill Hastings, and he is about the meanest man on the face of the earth. That's true as sure as I am Sam Wilkins' wife."

"Believe me!" cried Tom, earnestly; "I have been fearfully wronged. I am innocent!"

"I don't doubt ye in the least," replied Mrs. Wilkins, eradily. "No doubt it was a put-up job. Bill was probably mad to think his barn was lost, and wanted to get satisfaction out of somebody."

"He has pursued an unjust method."

"You're right, but——"

The farmer's wife never finished her sentence. With a wild, excited cry she sprang back from the window.

At the same moment the rattle of wheels was heard.

An instinctive sense of danger brought Tom to his feet.

"As I live!" cried Mrs. Wilkins, "there's Jerry Powers and Bill, now! They've tracked ye here, no doubt. Don't lose no time! Quick, for your life!"

CHAPTER III.

TOM GIVES HIS FOES THE SLIP.

Tom Curtis needed only to glance through the open window to find a verification of Mrs. Wilkins' declaration.

A wagon had driven furiously into the yard and two men sprang out of it and rushed toward the house. They were Jerry Powers and Bill Hastings.

In that moment of terror Tom seemed glued to the spot. It was all like a fearful nightmare.

But the plucky Mrs. Wilkins was quick to act. She clutched Tom's arm and drew him to the door, which, upon being opened, disclosed a flight of stairs.

"Go up there!" she exclaimed hastily. "Go clear up to the roof. Get out on the ridgepole and shut the trap after ye. If they come up there after ye there's a lean-to roof just below. Drop down onto that and skip."

Tom needed no urging.

He sprang up the stairs and made his way as directed to the attic. Here he managed to climb through a skylight onto the roof.

He heard Powers' voice at the door below as he accosted Mrs. Wilkins.

"We're looking for a young fellow about eighteen, with light hair and blue eyes," Powers announced, tersely, as Mrs. Wilkins answered his rap. "Hev you seen any such a person hereabouts?"

"Ye'd better ask the men. They're working on a fence down in the meadow. Maybe they know something about him," replied the farmer's wife evasively.

"But we tracked him here," persisted Powers. "Allow me to inform you, madam, that I am an officer of the law."

"I know ye quite well, Jerry Powers. But ye'll have to look further for your man," replied Mrs. Wilkins.

"Have you any objection to our going through the house?" asked Powers.

"Ain't my word enough?" flashed the farmer's wife.

"Oh, yes, ma'am; but ye know the chap might have crawled in here unbeknownst to ye."

"You'd better go talk with my husband, Jerry Powers."

"No, I haven't got time!" persisted the constable. "I am in duty bound to search your house, Sarah Wilkins."

"If my husband was here ye wouldn't cross the threshold," said Mrs. Wilkins, in scathing tones. "He'll settle with ye for this insult."

The villain only laughed contemptuously, and Powers pushed her into the house.

"Come on, Bill," he cried; "it's dollars to doughnuts we find our man here."

"Ye'll not find him in this house, for he's not in it!" cried the irate farmer's wife.

This was true enough. Tom was out of it, practically speaking, on the roof, as it were. The two searchers went through the house thoroughly and never thought once of looking out on the roof.

As a result they were disappointed. They left the house only to search the outbuildings. Then, chagrined and defeated, they left.

As they drove out of the yard after their ineffectual quest, Tom came down from his perch. His first move was to offer his hand to Mrs. Wilkins, saying:

"Your kindness I shall never forget. Perhaps some day I may be more of a man than I am now and I will be able to repay you."

"I feel sure you will be a man some day, my boy," said Mrs. Wilkins, encouragingly. "All you want is to be given a chance."

"Yes," cried Tom eagerly, "I will strive hard to prove my worth, if I am given a chance. Thus far, however, there has seemed no place for me in the wide world."

"Never despair," cried the kind-hearted woman. "Your turn will come, and then you can laugh your foes to scorn."

"Hoity-toity! What's all this?" cried a cheery voice.

A man stood in the doorway mopping the perspiration from his heated brow. He was a stalwart farmer, and his eyes twinkled as they rested upon Tom.

"Sam Wilkins!" cried the farmer's spouse, joyfully. "I wish you'd been here ten minutes ago. I'd asked you to give that sassy Jerry Powers a kicking."

"What! kick a constable?" exclaimed Farmer Wilkins, so lugubriously, that Tom fell to laughing. "That would be contempt of court, you know. But you haven't introduced your cousin to me."

"Cousin!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilkins. "Why, Sam, this young man I have——"

"Enough!" cried the farmer, with a hearty laugh, and sinking into a chair. "I see you're up to your old trick, Sary. Couldn't see a man hung, could ye? Oh, I know all about it. Ye see, both Jerry an' Hastings stopped me out on the road an' told me all about it. Says I to myself, says I, that's some more of Sary's kind-hearted work. I'll bet she's hid that chap away outen pity. An' it was so. Ha! ha! ha!"

"What!" cried the wife, with mock severity. "An' Jerry Powers told you he'd invaded this house and you didn't kick him? Sam Wilkins, you're going crazy!"

"Well, ye see, the truth is, I didn't think it worth while," declared the jovial Wilkins.

With this he sat down and talked with Tom. The result was a friendly bit of advice.

"I see how ye're fixed, my boy," he declared warmly, "an' I'd like to help ye. I'd give ye a chance right quick on this farm of mine, but the truth is, ye'd be in jeopardy. Jerry would pounce onto ye right off. Now I jest think ye'd better go right on and put as good a distance as possible between ye and this part of the kentry. Here's something I'll loan ye fer five years. By that time ye will be able to repay me."

Wilkins slipped something into Tom's hand. It was a crisp ten-dollar bill. The kindly farmer insisted on the "loan," as he called it.

"I was down on my uppers once, jest like you," he declared. "I borrowed the same from a man an' I paid it back with interest. I ain't afraid to trust a boy of your stamp."

"My kind friends," said Tom, with shaking voice, "I shall never, never forget you. I shall have a chance some time to repay you well."

And Tom mentally registered a vow to never forget these good people. He was given a luncheon neatly put up by Mrs. Wilkins, and then, bidding them good-by, once more started on his way.

For three days Tom Curtis wandered on through back roads and across wild stretches of country. His pursuers seemed to have been disposed of and his mind was easy and cheerful when he came to a small hamlet upon the banks of a river which ran madly over high rapids.

Tom had slept out of doors nights and subsisted all this while upon the luncheon given him by Mrs. Wilkins. This was now exhausted, however.

A wonderful scene was spread before him. The river was a picturesque torrent in the heart of a wild country. The hamlet seemed to be little more than a woodcutter's camp.

Far above he saw a mighty boom of logs. Just below them were fierce rapids, and midway these rapids formed a basin in quite smooth water. Upon this basin Tom saw a young girl in a boat, rowing for the opposite shore.

She was singing in a wonderfully sweet voice, and Tom was listening, enchanted, when a terrible thing happened. A fearful, hoarse cry came from above; red-shirted river men appeared on the banks. Tom saw the cause with awful horror.

The mighty mass of logs above were racing down into the rapids. The boom had broken!

With a thousand thunders, more terrible than heaven's artillery, the mighty mass struck the rapids. The scene was indescribable.

Down swept the mass. Warning shouts reached the young girl in the boat. Her face blanched and she rowed faster.

But Tom saw at a glance that she could never reach the shore in time.

The thought that she would be engulfed was a horrible one. It held Tom spellbound for a moment.

Down swept that mighty mass. Logs, like puppets, were flung high in air, tilted, wedged, were hurled and tossed like sticks upon that flood.

The next moment the boat and its fair occupant were hurled aloft. The boat was visible over the mass of logs, and then Tom made action.

He never stopped to think of consequences, but regardless of the peril, sprang out upon that fearful, whirling mass. On and on he went, leaping, falling, plunging, with the one purpose most heroic, of a brave rescue!

CHAPTER IV.

TOM FINDS A JOB.

Not the hardiest and most daring of the river men thought of the feat which Tom Curtis essayed. It was almost certain "Do you think you could make High Falls your home?"

death to attempt the crossing of that mighty, whirling, heaving mass.

A slip, a slip, the slightest misstep was likely to hurl one to an instant and awful death.

No effort of pen or imagination could depict the situation.

To his dying day Tom Curtis never knew how he was given the miraculous power to effect that brave rescue. But still across that tossing mass he went, springing nimbly from one log to another, now slipping and recovering and still keeping on.

And now the endangered young girl sees him.

Her eyes are upon him, but he cannot speak to her. The fearful thunder of those tossing logs drowns all other sounds.

Nearer, still nearer he draws to her. Heavens, what peril was about them! How close to death they were!

Now he has almost reached her, when the logs yawn and twenty feet of watery abyss is between them.

But this is only for an instant. There is a fearful roar, and one gigantic log is hurled in the air. It bridges the abyss and unresistingly Tom springs upon it.

His nerves are still, his muscles tense and firm.

He knows that to fail is death. He is determined to succeed. Across the log he runs like a squirrel.

Now he has reached the fragile boat, which is tossing upon the sea of timber. The bridge which he has just crossed is swept away in a twinkling.

He reaches the boat and looks at her. She seems to read his wishes in that glance.

She rises in the light craft and Tom's arm is about her waist. He scarcely pauses in his career.

Lifting her in his strong, young arms as if she were a feather, he keeps straight on across the river. He does not turn back. There was excellent reason for this. To turn or stop would be to break the possible charm which seemed to hold his life sacred.

Again, it would mean a delay which might be fatal. So straight on he goes.

It was well that he pursued this move. At this part of the rapids there was a sudden jam. It lasted long enough to enable him to cross on the temporary bridge safely to shore.

A hundred people were at the water's edge to welcome him. The air was broken with the wildest of cheers.

Red-shirted lumbermen, well-dressed citizens, men, women and children, all flocked to the river bank to welcome this real hero.

But the great strain was over, and now came reaction.

Little Tom Curtis reaped none of those mighty acclamations of praise. The moment his feet touched the hands he realized his hold upon the young girl and pitched forward in an unconscious heap.

"Stand back! Give him air!" cried an authoritative voice.

Then a tall, heavy-built man appeared and the crowd fell back. He caught the girl in his arms and kissed her.

"Thank heavens, you are safe, Annie!" he cried.

Then quickly he stooped down and turned Tom over so that he lay upon his back. He drew a whisky flask from his pocket and pressed its mouth between Tom's lips. Our hero gasped, shivered, and the relaxation of his muscles showed that he was coming to.

"Who is he?" cried one in the crowd.

All scanned Tom's face.

"He is a stranger."

"Where did he come from?"

"He is a likely looking lad. I'll wager he is no vagrant, anyway," said one man, bending closer. "I say, Montclair, but for his bravery where would your daughter Annie be now?"

"I realize it," said the large gentleman who was trying to revive Tom. "I don't know who he is, and I never saw him before, but as true as my name is Stephen Montclair he shall be rewarded, and shall never lose my gratitude."

"Oh, papa!" cried the rescued girl, now fully recovered from her awful fright, and kneeling down by Mr. Montclair's side. "What a wonderful thing it was! How can we ever repay him?"

"Leave that to me, dearest," said the father, in a voice full of emotion.

At this juncture Tom suddenly moved and opened his eyes. Then he made an effort to rise. The faintness left him and he was quickly upon his feet.

"What—what happened?" he asked, in a puzzled way. "Did I faint? Oh, I remember! I crossed on the logs."

"My dear young man," cried Col. Montclair, fulsomely, "you have accomplished the most wonderful feat on record and made of yourself a hero forever in the eyes of all present."

Poor Tom looked confused and much abashed.

"I thought the lady in danger," he said.

"Indeed, but for you she would now be dead!" cried Montclair. "What is your name, my boy?"

"Tom Curtis," replied Tom.

"Where do you live?"

Ah, that was an unfortunate question. Tom could not have answered at that moment for the life of him. Could he tell these strangers his true circumstances? At first his pride rebelled, then he said, with sudden resolution and a degree of sadness:

"The world is the only hope I have, sir."

Col. Montclair seized Tom's hand, wringing it forcibly.

"You could have said nothing to please me more!" he cried.

"I understand you quite well, and I can see that there is a chance for me to help you, and thus in a measure repay you what I owe you. Come with me."

But Tom hesitated.

"Pardon me," he said, "I do not understand."

"Well, you will," replied Col. Montclair, persuasively. "I know you look hungry and tired. I invite you to become my guest."

What could Tom do better than to accept that kind invitation? Though he felt awkward enough when he discovered that it was to the residence of the millionaire of High Falls that he was to go.

Col. Montclair owned the grist and lumber mills and the water power of this backwoods town. Yet, in spite of the fact that High Falls was in the heart of the woods and remote from any great city, it was a very progressive town.

It boasted of three churches, a score of stores, many dwellings, a fire department, and quite a number of extensive enterprises. But the lumber interest was supreme.

Tom had never seen a town so richly endowed by nature before. The streets were wide and shaded with the original forest trees. To be sure, the town yet retained the stamp of the border, the buildings in the main being of rough lumber and cheaply constructed, yet it was certain that High Falls would some day be a large and prosperous city.

A strange sense of content and happiness stole over Tom. Already he began to form golden plans for the future.

He saw his opportunity. Here was a chance to his liking. He might settle here in this growing community, identify himself with its interests and grow up with it. It was a bright dream.

Mr. Montclair seemed to read the youth's mind. He was secretly much pleased.

"Well, Tom, what do you think of High Falls?" he asked, when at length the carriage turned into his own driveway.

"I think it a place of great possibilities," replied Tom, promptly.

"Ah! but is it not a place of realities as well?"

"Indeed, sir, it is. I like it very much," replied Tom, honestly.

Then he stopped, somewhat overawed, as the carriage came to a halt before the door of the colonel's lovely residence. Tom felt not a little out of place in the rich interior of the millionaire's home. But Col. Montclair was possessed of the necessary tact to at once dispel this feeling.

He had taken a wonderful fancy to Tom Curtis.

Had he been asked he would have replied that in his estimation here was a lad who, if given a chance, would make his mark in the world.

"He shall have the chance if it is in my power to accord it to him," the colonel mentally resolved.

Tom was dined, and then the colonel proposed that they should walk down to the mill. Of course, Tom was very glad to accompany his new-found friend, and some hours were spent very profitably in the place. Some while later they returned home.

Tom that night slept between immaculate sheets and on a pillow of down. Indeed, so agreeable was his bed that he would liked to have overslept in the morning.

After a breakfast the colonel asked him into his library. Tom saw at a glance that there was a matter of some sort upon his benefactor's mind.

"Tom Curtis," said the colonel, slowly, as he lit a cigar, "have you as yet formed any plans in life? Have you ever thought of any profession which you would like to follow?"

Tom was silent a moment.

"Your question is a sweeping one, Col. Montclair," he finally replied. "I am quite willing to adopt any honorable calling, no matter how humble, and I would do my best to excel."

"It is my ambition to arise with just such a town as this. In fact, grow up with it, sir."

"Good! You would just as soon work for me as any one?"

Tom's face flushed with pleasure.

"I would rather work for you than any person I ever knew," he replied frankly.

The colonel seemed much pleased.

"Then it is settled!" he cried. "And I will take you into my employ, Tom Curtis. It is a mutual agreement?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom, eagerly. "What shall my duties be, Mr. Montclair?"

"You are young," he said slowly. "But you have already told me of your excellence in the Woodvale school. I shall take you into the office with me and as soon as you have mastered a knowledge of the lumber business you shall become my business manager with a salary of three thousand dollars a year to start on."

Tom started as if with an electric shock. His head swam, and he trembled with the enormity of this proposition. He was a youth of ample self-confidence, yet not disposed to over-rate his personal abilities. It cost him but a few moments' reflection to decide upon the proper move. He arose with dignity and said:

"Colonel Montclair, I thank you, but I cannot accept your kind offer."

"What!" exclaimed the colonel, in astonishment. "You decline?"

"Yes, sir."

"But—"

"I will give you my reason, sir. I know that my present capabilities are not adequate."

"But that matters not," cried the colonel, impulsively. "I will soon give you the necessary points."

"Pardon me, but I have a better plan," said Tom frankly. "I wish to enter your employ, Colonel Montclair. I shall try hard to rise in your esteem and in value to you. But I have no knowledge of this branch of business. To first acquire it, I prefer to begin at the bottom of the ladder and work my way up. If I am able to do so I shall soon master it and rise."

"Do you mean to say that you wish first to enter the mill as a workman?"

"I do," replied Tom.

"Ah, well," and the colonel's face cleared, "that will be all right. You can draw your salary of three thousand just the same. It will be only a practical and no doubt the best way of learning the business."

"No!" said Tom decisively. "I cannot accept more than the salary which belongs to the position I occupy."

Argument on the colonel's part was of no avail. Tom had his notions of right and wrong, and was disposed to adhere to them. Secretly the colonel was highly pleased with the traits of honor and fearlessness displayed by Tom.

"He is certainly right," he acknowledged to himself. "But he is one boy in ten thousand to reject such an offer. Why, out of gratitude, I would have gladly paid him the three thousand a year for doing nothing. Ah, well, I like the lad and his principles. Hang me! I'll stick by him and help him in every way I can."

CHAPTER V.

A MEAN TRICK.

It chanced that in the sawmill there also worked an ignorant, egotistical fellow named Sidney Dana. He was full ten years Tom's senior and almost from their first meeting there was an antagonism between the two.

Dana was much given to bullying. He was a powerful man, with heavy features and cruel, cold, gray eyes. Nearly every man in the mill feared him.

Of course, Dana was conversant with the circumstance of Tom's coming to High Falls. At once he felt safe in trying the oppressor's part upon the orphan boy.

He worked at the next bench to Tom and at first manifested a friendliness toward the newcomer which Tom accepted cautiously. It was only a cloak to cover his real purpose.

The villain, for such he was, first began a series of petty persecutions, such as borrowing Tom's tools and failing to return them, and making a complaint to the foreman to the effect that Tom purloined his tools and nothing more was seen of them, and so forth. Of course, serious complications at once arose.

The facts were that the mean-spirited oppressor damaged his own knives and saws and hid them under Tom's bench to clench the guilt upon our hero. Here they were found by the foreman, which resulted in Tom's temporary suspension.

The effect of this upon the orphan boy can hardly be imagined.

Here was a wrong which at first he hardly seemed able to right. The evidence seemed against him, and Tom was in an agony for fear the matter would be carried to Col. Montclair.

"He will believe that he misjudged me," he reflected, "and never more have confidence in me. It is not right, and I will prove my innocence or take it out of that villain's hide."

A reaction had set in, and Tom's blood was up. He went directly to Dana and faced him.

"What do you mean by placing those broken tools under my bench?" he demanded sternly. "No prevarication, please. You know you placed them there."

At the moment they were in the lumber yard, and Mr. Dudley, the foreman, and half a score of others were present. Dana's shrewd eyes glittered in seeming triumph as he replied:

"That is a pretty way to try to crawl out your hole, you young pauper. Bah! you'd better go back to the poorhouse, where you came from!"

Tom quivered beneath this insult like a high-tempered horse beneath the lash. He was tempted to strike the wretch, but wisely restrained himself.

"Spare your taunts," he said, calmly. "That has nothing to do with this matter. You know that you played this mean trick upon me, sir, and I want you to admit it."

Dana dropped his axe and advanced with clenched fist and a bullying manner.

"Take care, you stripling," he blustered. "Don't you dare to tell me I did anything of the kind. Why, for half a cent, I'd break you in two!"

Tom's lion-like spirit was thoroughly aroused. What mattered it to him if the bully was twice his size. He stood up to him boldly and replied:

"I do dare tell you that you placed those tools under my bench to get me into trouble."

"You do, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you lie!"

Tom's right arm went up and he would have struck the villain but Mr. Dudley stepped between them.

"Enough of this," he declared forcibly. "There must be no fighting here. But understand, both of you, this matter is going to be thoroughly investigated."

"I hope it will, sir," said Tom.

"If it is you'll kick that young pauper out of the mill!" hissed Dana.

But before another word could be spoken one of the yardmen stepped forward and touched his hat to Foreman Dudley.

"If you please, sir," he said.

"Well, Mike Welch," said Dudley, "what is it?"

"I think I can throw a little light on this matter, sir."

Everybody gave a start, and Dana turned a trifle pale.

"Proceed, Welch," said Dudley.

"Two days ago, sir," pursued the yardman, "I was working in the planing-room, cleaning up. I saw Sid Dana take the broken tools, sir, and place them under the young man's bench. I didn't think anything of it, sir, at the time, for I didn't know that he was mean enough to get the young chap into trouble."

The effect of this declaration was most astounding. Every eye was turned upon Dana. He turned white and red by turns.

"It's a lie!" he exploded. "It's a put-up job on me, between 'em!"

"Oh, no, Sid," returned Welch, coolly. "Terry Sullivan was with me at the time and saw the same thing."

"So I did," attested a second witness, who was, like Welch, one of the yardmen.

The villain was foiled. Tom Curtis was triumphant and this time cleared of an unjust charge. Mr. Dudley's keen gaze seemed to pierce the cowering villain through and through.

"This is the meanest, most cowardly piece of work I ever heard of!" he declared, scathingly. "Sid Dana, you are discharged! Never darken the premises again. Curtis, go back to your bench. You are exonerated."

The yardmen rose as one and gave a thrilling cheer. Dana, crestfallen but smarting vengefully with defeat, slunk out

of the yard. From that moment he plotted a black revenge upon Tom Curtis.

Whether the incident reached the ears of Col. Montclair or not Tom never knew. But it had the effect of making him the most popular person in the mill. He now had friends by the score.

But Sid Dana was not the sort of a person to drop the matter here. His black soul was capable of any sort of a revenge, and he was not long in hitting upon a scheme.

It chanced that Col. Montclair was the owner of a very valuable stable of race horses. One of them, a fleet horse and of good pedigree, was entered in the races at Wallingford, a city some twenty miles distant.

Col. Montclair had staked much on winning the race. In fact, quite a number of thousands of dollars was upon the race.

Of course, Tom knew but little what was going on at Wallingford, and he merely heard in a casual way of the colonel's entry in the race.

But he was at once interested. He was passionately fond of horses, and when it was learned that the colonel intended to give his employees a half holiday, on that day, he made up his mind he would see Blackbird run.

The men were to go up to Wallingford on the twelve o'clock train. The race would start at two o'clock, which would give all ample time. Tom was in a fever of excitement over the matter.

Finally the race day came. The mills were shut down and everybody was preparing to leave by the noon train.

Tom was one of the last to leave the mill. He had a scant half hour allowed him to go to his lodgings, dress and catch the train.

He had passed out of the planing shop and had reached the end of a long pile of lumber, when he was brought to a halt in a singular manner.

Voices from behind the lumber came to his hearing. Tom was always averse to playing eavesdropper, but he recognized one of the voices as that of Dana, and he therefore felt constrained to listen.

"I tell ye Blackbird never'll win it. I know what I'm talking of."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, I do."

"But how do you know that?"

"Why, Bill Jeffries, the jockey who will ride Blackbird, has been bribed. He will pull the horse and Carnation will win. It's the honest truth. I have it from the jock's own brother."

"By Jupiter! What will Colonel Montclair do?"

"Humph! I don't know nor care. He will lose ten thousand dollars, and I'm glad of it."

Dana laughed contemptuously as he made this declaration. His companion, a flashily dressed man, joined in the laughter, and said:

"Well, Sid, let's go up and back Carnation. He is the winner."

"Yes, if Bill Jeffries rides Blackbird."

The two men passed beyond hearing. Tom stood for a moment like one in a trance.

But he quickly aroused, for he knew that a crisis was at hand, and all depended upon him. He made instant action.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

Like a flash the whole truth had swept over Tom Curtis.

He knew from Sid Dana's declaration that his benefactor, Col. Montclair, was to become the victim of a treacherous game. It made Tom's blood boil.

The jockey who was to ride Blackbird had been bribed to throw the race. It was all as plain as the nose on one's face.

The colonel would be victimized and the backers of Blackbird wronged. Tom knew that a diabolical, underhand game was being played.

This was enough for him. The determination to spoil the dastardly scheme seized him.

He hesitated but a moment. Then, with impulse, he started for Col. Montclair's house.

Springing up the steps he rang the bell. In answer Annie Montclair came to the door.

"Why, Tom!" she exclaimed, in surprise. "I thought you had gone to the race."

"Your father!" exclaimed Tom, excitedly. "Where is he? I must see him!"

"Why, he has gone up to Wallingford to the race," replied Annie Montclair.

"Gone?" echoed Tom, hollowly. "Oh, then it is too late!"

"Why, what is the matter?" asked the young girl, in deepest alarm. "What is wrong, Tom?"

In as few words as possible, Tom told her the truth. Annie wrung her hands in despair.

"Why, that is too bad!" she cried. "But we must let him know in some way. He started to go on the train, Tom. Perhaps if you could reach the depot and intercept him——"

But no, this was quite impossible. From the high ground on which the house stood the train could be seen speeding out of the town. The town clock had struck twelve a few minutes before.

"Too late!" gasped Tom. "And if he does not get word he will lose the race and ten thousand dollars."

Annie Montclair was a girl not of the ordinary sort. Brave to a fault and ready of expedient her mind was quickly made up as to what to do.

"Tom," she said, earnestly, "it is twenty miles to Wallingford. Will you go with me? I know the road well, and with Bay Bess and the light wagon we can just about make it before the race starts."

Tom's reply was brief:

"Of course I will."

Annie sprang into the house to don hat and cloak. Meanwhile a message was sent to the stable for the fleet mare Bess. A few moments later the light team was at the door.

Tom took the reins and Annie sat by his side. Both were much excited, and Tom let the gamy mare out to her utmost.

Never to their dying hours did they forget that ride. Up hill and down, across plains, through dark forests, on and on for miles they sped.

The noble mare never faltered, though her sides were white with ridges of foam, and her nostrils distended. At two o'clock they were just five miles from Wallingford.

With a good, fresh horse it would have been easy to cover that distance in less than half an hour. But Bay Bess was panting and exhausted.

Still she kept on. Now the distant spires of the city were in sight.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, jubilantly. "We shall make it!"

So it seemed when the race course, thronged with people, suddenly burst into view. Tom arose in the wagon and urged the noble mare forward.

Just at that moment both Tom and Annie saw a black horse appear on the track. It was Blackbird out for the preliminary canter.

Up to the gates drove Tom and sprang out. By chance Col. Montclair had seen them coming and now came rushing forward.

"Why, my children, what is the matter?" he asked anxiously, as he noted their trepidation.

"Oh, papa!" gasped Annie, breathlessly, "you must not let Jeffries ride your horse!"

The colonel could not have been more astounded had a bomb exploded in the vicinity. He gazed at his daughter and then at Tom and exclaimed blankly:

"What do you mean?"

"It means," said Tom earnestly, "that Jeffries has been bribed!"

"Jeffries bribed!" gasped the colonel. "Impossible! It cannot be!" Then he lowered his voice: "For heaven's sake, Tom, come aside where we can't be heard. What is this you say? Tell me all at once."

Tom at once narrated the conversation he had overheard between Dana and his colleague. The colonel listened, spell-bound. Then he said, despairingly:

"What am I going to do? Jeffries is the only man whom I can get to ride Blackbird. The race is lost in any event. Confound these dishonest jockeys! I will investigate at once."

The colonel went to the rail of the race track. Jeffries was just cantering past. The colonel beckoned to him to come in.

Blackbird was led in by the grooms, and Jeffries stood before his employer. He was a diminutive, black-eyed fellow, with a cunning leer about his prematurely aged face.

"Jeffries," said the colonel, affecting carelessness, "I have decided not to start Blackbird in the race."

Words could not adequately depict the effect of this upon the dishonest jockey.

"What!" he cried, in amazement. "Ye don't mean that, Colonel Montclair?"

"Yes, I do," replied the colonel firmly.

"But—what is the reason? You are foolish. Haven't you backed the horse for about ten thousand?"

Colonel Montclair bent a piercing gaze upon the young villain.

"Yes; and I may as well lose that money outright by default as to allow you to ride Blackbird and drop the race."

Jeffries gave a hoarse cry and turned all colors. For a moment he trembled like a leaf. Then he recovered himself. But he had betrayed himself to the colonel's satisfaction.

"Who dares say that?" cried the jockey, savagely. "It is a lie! I dare any man to accuse me of such intention."

"Take care, Jeffries," said the colonel sternly; "I have necessary evidence to prove you guilty. You make your living on the turf. Be wise and leave my stable this moment. You know that I could report you to the racing association and have you expelled for your dishonesty. Don't dare me to do that."

Guilt showed in every line of Jeffries' face. He snapped his whip savagely, leaving the stable abruptly, muttering as he did so:

"The jig is up!"

Col. Montclair turned to Tom.

"My boy, I want to thank you for the service you have done me. I am loath to draw Blackbird out of the race, but I would rather do so than to allow that young villain to pull the horse and defraud me as he intended."

"Then you won't start the horse, colonel?" asked the trainer of the stable.

"No. I have nobody to ride the horse."

"I wish I wasn't so heavy," muttered the groom.

An inspiration seized Tom Curtis. With mechanical impulse he stepped forward and said:

"Colonel Montclair, I will ride for you and try to win."

The colonel started as if shot, and regarded Tom critically.

"You!" he gasped.

"Yes."

"But—did you ever ride in a race?"

"Indeed, sir, I have often galloped horses with the trainers on the track at Woodvale," declared Tom. "I think I can show you, sir. I will do my best."

"Blamed if he ain't about the right weight, colonel!" cried the stable trainer. "Try him on a canter. I've got my money on Blackbird, an', boy, if ye win this race, Tim Murphy will do the right thing."

"I will win it if the horse can get there!" cried Tom, with resolution.

"Then you shall ride!" cried the colonel, joyfully. "Tom, you are a godsend to me. I feel that you will win."

In a few moments Tom had on the silks and then was weighed in. He was about two pounds overweight, but this would not greatly handicap Blackbird.

With the appearance of a new jockey upon the back of the favorite, a great sensation was created.

All sorts of rumors spread through the crowd. The villain, Sid Dana, had been backing Carnation liberally. Now, when he saw Tom Curtis on Blackbird's back, he started as if he had seen a ghost.

"Thunder and blazes!" he exclaimed, in consternation. "The colonel has pulled Jeffries off! He must have got hold of something. Cuss that young pauper! He will ride to win, and my money is up, that's for a certainty! I wish I could kill him!"

There was a murderous light in Dana's eyes. The events of that afternoon were to be sealed with one of a tragic sort.

But it was near time for the horses to start in the race.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RACE.

It chanced at that moment that Dana turned and saw Jeffries, the dismounted jockey, not but a few feet distant.

There was a disconsolate expression upon Jeffries' face and he turned with a savage curse as Dana touched his arm.

"What the devil do you want?"

"Easy, pard," rejoined the senior villain. "I'm the one to feel sore. My money's up and here you're not to ride."

"Well, I can't help it."

"Who is to blame?"

"Not me, certainly. Some accursed fool like you who must go and warn somebody of the real snap. Don't come around me any more. If I'm seen in your society I'll be suspended."

"Pshaw! don't be a fool!" said Dana, imperturbably. "You've a little pile on Carnation, too, haven't you?"

Jeffries looked about him apprehensively.

"Well, what of it?" he snapped.

"Then I'll give you a pointer—wait, not to hedge, but how to win."

"Win?"

"Yes—win."

Jeffries looked at Dana searchingly.

"You are trifling with me."

"No, I ain't."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm yours. What is it?"

"Come with me!"

Dana walked aside with the jockey. For some time they were engaged in low-toned conversation.

When they concluded this, Jeffries went whistling away to the stables, and Dana mingled with the crowd.

The betting was high on Blackbird as the favorite, though a few cautious ones hedged, on the presumption that no one could make Blackbird win but Jeffries.

But at this moment the famous horse came onto the track for his preliminary gallop, with the new rider on his back. Every eye was upon the pair.

But Tom Curtis was wholly unconscious of this. He secured his seat, took a gentle pull on the reins and rose in the stirrups.

As though horse and rider were one they moved down the track.

If Tom Curtis was not an experienced jockey certainly none ever sat a horse with such ease and grace as he did. He betrayed in every movement the natural rider.

Every eye was upon him, and the crowd caught an inspiration and gave way to the wildest applause. Tom never dreamed that they were cheering him.

"He sits the horse as well as Jeffries ever did!" cried one man.

"He may be a better jockey for all we know," rejoined another.

"I shall not hedge."

"Nor I."

"Sink or swim, I shall stick by Blackbird. See how easy he moves. Now, he is taking a pull on him. Handsome pair, I tell you."

Thus the enthusiasm waxed deeper and stronger every moment. As for Colonel Montclair, he was in a transport of joy. He turned to Annie, who was by his side, and said:

"Fortune is with me, Annie. That Tom Curtis rides better than Jeffries."

Annie blushed like a peony as she made reply:

"He is far superior in all respects."

"Of course," agreed the colonel, hastily, "Tom is a higher-bred fellow and of a different class. He will win this race, I feel sure; and if he does, I shall reward him well."

"You can afford to do that, papa."

"I will certainly do it."

But at this moment the starter appeared with his flag and the horses were warned to the post. Nine in number, with their gaily dressed riders, they formed a pretty spectacle as they formed line up the home stretch.

A great hush now fell upon the crowd. All were intent upon watching the start, and the majority had their gaze fastened upon Blackbird and Carnation, the two cracks generally acknowledged.

It was conceded that the race would be practically between these two horses. Therefore, the others aroused but little interest.

Suddenly a sharp cry went up. The horses had broke for the start and came plunging down the track. But the starter waved them back again.

Several of these false starts were made, then the cry went up like a roar of thunder from the vast multitude:

"They are off!"

Down the track they came like meteors. As they passed the grandstand the favorites did not show in front. Several of the outsiders cut the pace out for half a mile.

Then one by one they began to fall back. Several times the leaders changed places, then a scarlet jacket was seen moving in the van.

"Carnation is up!" was the great cry. "See him cut them down!"

Indeed, the great crack mowed his opponents with ease, and showed two lengths at the front at the three-quarter-mile post.

A wild cheer went up from his backers.

"Carnation has it easy! Carnation will win!"

Even Col. Montclair, who was in the first balcony with his fieldglasses, waxed uneasy, and turning to Annie, exclaimed:

"Really I don't see why Tom don't move Blackbird up a little!"

"Where is Blackbird?" was the cry now. "He will be beaten!"

Indeed, so it seemed. Carnation's great rival was back in the ruck, and scarcely seemed to be moving. A sort of frenzy seized the colonel.

"Good gracious!" he gasped, nervously, "why don't Tom move him up?"

But Annie seemed as cool and confident as ever. She placed a hand on her father's arm and said:

"Don't fear, papa; there is plenty of time yet. Perhaps Tom can't get through the crowd. When he does, he will be all right."

"Confound it! but he ought to have looked out for that!" cried the anxious colonel. "A good jockey will never get pocketed."

"But it may not be his fault."

"Pshaw! don't talk to me that way, Annie."

The young girl's face flushed, but she still kept her gaze on the knot of horses in which she knew Blackbird was running. Her lips moved with something like a prayer.

The multitude was now in an absolutely frenzied state. Men leaped up and waved their arms and shouted themselves hoarse.

"Carnation! Carnation will win!" was the mighty cry.

Once the colonel looked down and saw Jeffries just below him. The dishonest jockey gave him a mocking glance. The colonel set his teeth tightly.

But suddenly he gave a convulsive gasp. Blackbird seemed to suddenly clear himself from the crowd and showed up second to Carnation. A hush fell upon the crowd. It could be seen that the rider was not urging his horse, and that the movement was easy and nonchalant.

But the upper turn was now reached. Carnation was four lengths ahead. But Blackbird, now, like magic, seemed to glide up nearer his rival. The distance was cut down in a twinkling to one length.

Into the homestretch they now showed. A few more strides and the hearts of the backers of Carnation fell. Twice, thrice the jockey in the scarlet jacket rose and struck his horse. Blackbird had not yet received a stroke, and now they were neck and neck in the stretch.

Heavens! what an exciting finish that was! Now Tom Curtis began to show his mettle. Up went his whip and the black thoroughbred straightened and seemed to leap two lengths ahead of Carnation.

"Blackbird! Blackbird wins!" yelled the wildly excited crowd.

Certainly the black horse at that point looked good to win, but suddenly Tom was seen to throw up his arms, reel, and partly fall from the saddle. The sharp crack of a pistol had been heard in the crowd.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MURDEROUS PLOT.

The pistol shot and the action of Blackbird's rider were all comprehensive to the people. Some dastardly villain had attempted murder of the vilest sort, and only a miracle saved Tom Curtis' life.

He felt a stinging pain in his side, and the shock nigh tumbled him from the saddle. He reeled and fell over Blackbird's side, but did not go off the horse.

Fortunately one leg caught beneath the saddle flap, and there he hung helplessly.

But the foul scheme failed, in one respect. Blackbird was first under the wire, and the race was won.

In an instant the people had burst through the fence and

out upon the track. The excitement and indignation against the dastardly perpetrator of the foul deed was strong.

Even those people who had lost on Carnation were outspoken against the infamous act.

But the perpetrator could not be found. The shot had been fired directly from the crowd, but the would-be assassin got out of the way so quickly that his identity was lost.

"Lynch him! Hang him to the first tree!" was the maddened cry.

It would have fared hard indeed with the wretch had he been caught at that moment.

Meanwhile, Blackbird had run a few hundred yards beyond the wire, and, owing to his training, came to a stop. Fortunately a groom was there to catch his bridle and Tom was freed from his saddle.

Tender hands carried the wounded youth to the stables and a surgeon made a quick examination of the wound. His face was bright as he arose and said:

"It is not necessarily fatal. The ball ran along the shoulder-blade and lodged not far from the backbone. It is just under the skin and can be easily removed."

"Leave nothing undone to save the boy's life," Col. Montclair cried, forcibly. "If it takes my fortune he must be saved. Do not fail!"

Tom was in a dazed state, but managed to look up and smile and say, hoarsely:

"Well, we won the race anyway, colonel."

"Won it!" exclaimed half a dozen bystanders. "I should say so! I never saw better riding in my life!"

"Nobody else shall ever ride a horse of mine," declared Col. Montclair, decidedly. "Tom Curtis, you are a hero!"

Tom's spirits were rapidly arising. The pain of the wound was great, yet he bore it well.

And now the conjecture arose as to who the would-be assassin was. It was a deep mystery to all except Tom. He did not venture an open declaration, but he firmly believed that it was Sid Dana.

Col. Montclair had the same opinion, and went so far as to notify the detectives to shadow Dana. But the villain had disappeared and not a trace of him could be found.

Doubtless he had feared action of this sort and was shrewd enough to keep shady.

Tom was removed to Col. Montclair's residence at High Falls, and there every attention possible was given him. The surgeon removed the bullet with ease, and after the wound-fever had been conquered the youth recovered rapidly.

The most assiduous in kind attentions at his bedside was Annie Montclair.

Her sweet face hovering over him was a pleasure most divine to Tom, who could only liken her to an angel of mercy.

"Why should I not give him earnest care?" she declared forcibly. "Did he not save my life at the bursting of the log boom? Indeed, we owe him more than we can ever repay."

This was true enough, yet Tom felt deeply grateful to his kind friends. However, in due course he was himself again and one day proposed going back to work.

Once again Mr. Montclair endeavored to make him accept a higher position in the mill, but Tom declined.

"As I master the business," he declared, "I will be glad to be promoted."

"Then," declared Col. Montclair, "I will elect you overseer of the planing mill. You are certainly far enough advanced for that."

Tom consented to accept this increase and at once entered upon his duties. No more races were at present scheduled for the colonel's horses, so that he was not called upon in that direction.

Life was beginning to look very bright for orphan Tom Curtis.

He was making the most of the chance offered him, and it began to look as if he would eventually mount the ladder of prosperity and honor to the topmost round.

People began to admire and respect his manly qualities. He grew rapidly very popular in High Falls.

He was a frequent visitor at Col. Montclair's, where he was introduced to people of refinement and culture.

And Tom felt quite sensibly now a few deficiencies in the matter of etiquette and universal knowledge. It was an obstacle to his success in society and he determined to overcome it.

As his pay was quite liberal now, he affected a plain but

becoming style of dress, polished his manners as well as his speech and studied assiduously nights in his room.

In fact, he had entered well upon a career which promised much. That success awaited him there would have been no doubt but for certain unfortunate happenings.

Nothing had been heard or seen of Dana for a long time.

The report had been circulated that he had fled the country and gone to California. Everybody felt relieved when this was reported.

But one day Tom entered the shop after working hours. Upon his bench lay a sheet of notepaper upon which was written the following:

"Tom.—I wish you would, as soon as you get this, take a look into the flume. I fear that a heavy leak has sprung and there is danger of a break. If you think it best we will shut down to-morrow for repairs. Col. Montclair."

Tom was not a little surprised that Col. Montclair should make this request of him instead of the overseer of the sawmill. However, he at once proceeded to acquiesce with the written orders.

The mill was deserted and as Tom made his way through a trap to the regions under the sawmill, everything was dark and ghostly and still.

The gates were shut above and the flume was empty. It was an enormous long chamber, forty feet in depth, carrying an immense volume of water. To get down into it a ladder was usually employed.

But the ladder was gone from its accustomed place and search as he would Tom could not find it.

After some useless search Tom finally decided to climb down into the place by means of the iron rods and wooden beams which braced it apart. He was successful in this, and finally stood upon the damp floor of the flume chamber.

He made his way along the passage, examining the timbers carefully.

"That is queer," he muttered. "They all seem to be new, and there are no decayed timbers here. What could the colonel have meant?"

He had now reached the end of the flume. Above his head was the chute leading to the great water-wheels which carried the machinery of the mill.

"Well," he muttered, "I can find nothing wrong. I will have to ask the colonel what it means."

It was his impulse to retrace his footsteps, but at that moment he was petrified with a sudden, awful and deadly realization. He heard the creaking of a windlass and the swirling and thunders of waters above!

"Heaven help me!" he cried in awful horror. "Somebody has opened the flume gates. Help! help! or I perish!"

CHAPTER IX.

TRACKED DOWN.

Pen cannot depict adequately the horrors of the position in which Tom Curtis was now placed.

There was no mistaking the fact, the flume gates were being opened and a fearful death faced our hero. There was no ladder to ascend by. The beams and rods by which he had descended were quite near the gates and could not be reached. What was to be done?

The flume walls here were quite smooth and slimy.

Who had opened the gates?

Was it accident, or was it design?

These questions swiftly flashed through Tom's brain, and then the crisis came. He had little time to prepare for it.

Down through the long chambers of the flume came those roaring, rushing waters. It was an avalanche, and the victim was caught up like a puppet, whirled aloft, tossed and carried under by the swirling undertow.

He came to the surface only by dint of hard struggling.

The water now had reached the usual mark, and the flume was full. There would have been a good chance for Tom, for he was a good swimmer, had the flood gates leading to the wheel remained closed.

He could have easily swam to the upper end of the flume and clambered out.

But the fiend who had turned on the flume-water also opened the flood gates, and the current which now rushed through the flume was far too strong for a swimmer to breast.

Tom knew what his fate was likely to be. Carried into the great water-wheel, by the current, he would be caught by the paddles, and though the machinery might be stopped before he could extricate himself he would certainly drown.

It was a horrible fate. But he was just desperate enough to clutch at a straw.

As chance had it, a small cleat had been nailed to the planks of the flume just above the water-line, for some purpose.

Tom's grasp fastened upon this and there he hung, his body drawn out and carried almost into the chute by the powerful current.

It was now a question of physical endurance. As long as he could hold on to the cleat he would be safe. But when he relaxed his grip upon this he would be carried to certain death.

In this fearful position Tom did what he considered the proper thing, viz., called lustily for help. It proved a fatal move.

"Help! help!"

His voice arose above the roaring of the waters and the thunder of the machinery.

The current was powerful, and it seemed as if he could hold on but a little while longer.

Twice Tom turned his head and mentally calculated his chance for a safe passage through the paddle-wheel. He concluded that it meant death.

And so he hung on.

Only the desperation of despair kept him up. Time and again he felt the impulse upon him to give up and accept his fate.

"Help! help!"

With a sudden thrill of joy he heard footsteps above him. He looked up and was transfixed with horror.

A man stood upon the flume walk above. He was large and powerful, and wore a mask. In spite of it Tom recognized him. In his hand was an axe.

"Sid Dana!" he gasped, convulsively.

Dana, for he it was, brandished the axe and hissed:

"So ye know me, eh? All right; it is a good thing. I've got ye now, curse ye, jest whar I want ye! Let go, or I'll cut yer hand off!"

Tom was nigh fainting with the terrors of the moment. But he managed to reply:

"You will make of yourself a murderer, Sid Dana!"

"I don't care for that. I want my revenge!"

"But I have never harmed you."

"You lie! But this is cheap talk. Let go of that beam, I tell ye!"

The villain bent down, and would have struck Tom's wrist with the keen axe. But at that moment there was the crushing of glass in a window above, and an arm was thrust through the pane and a stern voice cried:

"Let up there, you scoundrel! Dare to strike and you're a dead man!"

The hand contained a revolver, and it covered Dana.

With the cowardice peculiar to him the villain dropped the axe, and, with a sharp cry, suddenly leaped from his position out into the river's current.

Probably from there he swam ashore. The same voice called to Tom:

"Hold on, Tom, my boy; I'll shut the gates and you shall be saved. It was a trick of that scoundrel's to kill you."

"I know that too well," replied Tom, with great joy. "You have saved me."

Tom knew that his preserver was Mike Martin, the mill watchman. He was just coming into the mill to go on duty for the night when he was electrified to find all the machinery going and no signs of anybody about.

By the merest chance he had reached the window in time to see Dana about to strike Tom with the axe. He had his revolver handy and acted promptly. It was a close call for Tom Curtis.

In a few moments the flume gates were closed. The water ran out rapidly and Tom dropped to the bottom of the flume. His strength now returned to him and he climbed out of the death-trap. Standing on the floor above he wrung Mike's hand and thanked him warmly for his prompt action.

The report of this incident that night aroused the town.

The place and its outskirts were thoroughly searched by armed men, but the shrewd villain kept out of the way. The next morning, however, Tom received the following startling note by mail:

"Tom Curtis—I write to warn you that you are pretty near the end of your rope in High Falls. I didn't fix ye in that flume job, but I've got a better one to spring on ye and ye'll hear from it before long,
Yours in haste,
"Sid Dana."

Immediately after the receipt of this epistle the constable of the town posted a notice offering one hundred dollars' reward for Dana's arrest.

"That villain shall be lodged behind bars!" declared Col. Montclair, vehemently. "His presence in this region is a menace to the safety of our people!"

Several days passed and nothing was seen or heard of Dana.

One day Tom was in the mill at work when he chanced to glance through a window into the yard below. A sight was there revealed to him which nearly paralyzed him with horror.

Just at the edge of a lumber pile stood three men. One of them he recognized as Dana.

But the other two were no others than Bill Hastings and the constable, Jerry Powers, from Woodvale.

Tom saw the facts in the case at a glance.

In some manner Hastings had run across Dana and learned that Tom was in High Falls. They were here now to arrest him upon the charge of incendiarism.

A fearful sense of impending ruin seized Tom Curtis. All in one swift moment his cherished plans of betterment and of future greatness were wafted away like mist before a summer's breeze. For a moment he seemed likely to suffocate.

A thousand terrifying reflections surged through his mind. What was his position now? What would Col. Montclair say? What would all the kind friends he had made in High Falls think of him in this awful disgrace?

He saw himself once more outlawed—cast upon the pitiless world without friends—without a name. The reflection was more than he could bear. A fearful groan burst from his lips and deadly faintness seized him. What should he do?

Tom suddenly made up his mind to run away, and did so. After wandering about for several days, he came to a town where there was a ball game being played between two teams called the Stars and Crescents. Now, Tom was a crackerjack pitcher. After watching the game for some while the pitcher on the Star team became injured by a thrown ball. Tom plucked up courage and approached the manager of the team, stated he would like to play, and was tried out. He won the game for the Stars. The manager, whose name was Nick Duprez, after hearing Tom's story decided to help the orphan boy.

"He is honest and true; I can see it in his face," he reflected.

Then he said aloud:

"You are looking for a rise in the world, Tom Curtis?"

"I am," replied Tom.

"Then I think that I can help you. I will offer you a handsome salary to pitch for the Stars the rest of the season, and will then help you to lucrative employment thereafter. What do you say to this?"

Tom hesitated, and a powerful wave of emotion surged over him. He was extremely desirous of accepting the chance offered him, but the old horror, like a grisly phantom, again confronted him.

"Oh, heaven!" he reflected, under his breath, "why was that cruel charge of incendiarism ever brought against me? It is a heavy curse, and may follow me to my grave."

Again he reasoned:

"Supposing these people, who are so kindly disposed toward me, ever find out my secret, what will they think? I shall be branded forever a villain."

Then a strong resolution, which outweighed fear, seized him.

"I may as well take my chances here," he muttered. "If I were a thousand miles from Woodvale I should not be altogether removed from danger of the law. I will take chances."

Accordingly he turned and extended his hand to Nick Duprez.

"If you are satisfied with me and my references," he declared, "I will accept your kind offer to play regularly with the Stars."

"Good!" cried Nick, delightedly. "You will never regret it. Your salary shall be one hundred dollars per month and expenses paid."

Tom bowed in grateful acknowledgment. The crowd were

leaving the grounds. Nick Duprez seemed to have taken a great fancy to Tom, and coming to his side insisted that he should enter his carriage and ride home with him.

"I want you to stop over to-night with me," he declared. "I want to talk over with you some points in regard to the next game, and also other matters."

The invitation was so pressing that Tom could not refuse. He reluctantly entered the carriage and was driven to the Duprez mansion.

It was a beautiful estate in the most fashionable part of the town. The Duprez family had long held control of the vast grain elevators which towered so high above all the other buildings. Only two years previous, Arnold Duprez had died, leaving as his sole relative and heir, his son Nick.

Fortunately, Nick Duprez was a young man of large capabilities and steady habits, and in a masterful way he assumed control of his father's business. He speedily became very popular and influential in Kirkwood.

Entering the elegantly furnished mansion, Nick seated Tom in the cheerful reception-room and said:

"There are newspapers on the table. Amuse yourself a little while until I can give an order for something to eat."

Then he left the room. Tom sank into an elegant chair and picked up one of the papers. Almost the first thing his eye caught was a startling headline:

"Tracked Down—The long search of William Hastings and Sheriff Powers for the rascally young incendiary, who has imposed on the credulity of the people of High Falls. Daring escape of Tom Curtis, and the great surprise which the discovery of his true character was to the good people of High Falls. A sensational case!"

Tom sank back, half fainting, and the paper dropped from his nerveless grasp.

CHAPTER X.

THE MISSING ONE.

Then he picked up the paper again and went on:

"Some while ago Tom Curtis made his appearance in High Falls in a dramatic and thrilling way. Miss Annie Montclair, the daughter of the well-known and genial colonel, was out boating below the falls when the boom above gave way and thousands of imprisoned logs were freed, to descend with frightful weight to crush her small boat.

"It seemed as if she were doomed, when Tom Curtis bravely ran across the flying field of logs, and, taking her in his arms, actually succeeded in making his way to shore. It was a feat wholly without a parallel!"

"Of course, this made of the young vagabond a hero, and Col. Montclair forthwith took him into his employ, little realizing what his true character was. It now transpires that Tom Curtis was a former inmate of a poorhouse at Woodvale, that he was kindly taken from the institution by William Hastings, a well-to-do farmer of Woodvale, given a good home and kind treatment.

"In a fit of anger, for revenge, he set fire to Hastings' barn and then escaped from Sheriff Powers, and has since been at large.

"It seems that Curtis is a dangerous character, though possessed of wonderful courage and many fine qualities. He is represented, however, as having a vengeful disposition, which leads him from the path of virtue. The discovery is a great shock to Col. Montclair and his daughter Annie. Detectives are upon the young rascal's track, and it is expected that he will soon be run down."

Tom Curtis read the article, word for word, and every line was to him an unjust vituperation, a lance in his heart. Weak and faint, the paper dropped from his nerveless grasp.

Many and chaotic were the thoughts which flashed through his brain.

"I wonder if any of the people here have read this?" he mused, with a thrill of terror and of shame. "I have given them my true name and my description is given in this paper."

"They must soon find out that I am the fugitive of the law mentioned in this paper. Am I to be all my life haunted by this Nemesis, this unjust charge? Better death!"

At this moment the door opened and Nick Duprez an-

peared. Tom realized that it would not do to betray his real feelings to his new-found friend, so with a desperate effort he threw off the dismal spell upon him and sprang to his feet.

Nick was all smiles and said:

"Come, let us dine, Tom. After that, to bed. To-morrow we will form new plans."

"But," exclaimed Tom, "am I to remain here to-night?"

"Until I can find lodgings for you. For that matter, all the while if you desire."

"You are too kind," replied Tom, with a lump in his throat.

Then he felt conscience-stricken. Would it not be nobler, fairer, to tell his new employer the truth in regard to his character and the stain upon it.

Was it not his duty?

Tom felt that it was. Yet for the life of him he could not do it. His tongue clung to the roof of his mouth.

He was more like one in a dream than aught else, as he sat down to the rich table so heavily loaded with dainties. In fact, his sensations must have been exactly similar to those of Damocles, over whose head hung the traditional sword.

He partook of the food with avidity. Indeed, he was nigh the starvation point, and, being a reasonably healthy youth, in spite of his distress of mind, he found it easy to summon an appetite.

While they ate, Nick kept up a pleasant conversation. Indeed, so entertaining was the young millionaire that Tom partly forgot his troubles.

"You see, I am all alone in the world, too," Nick declared. "My father died a few years ago, and since then I have been my own master and man of business. At times I am lonely enough. My position is similar to yours."

"With the exception that you are blessed with wealth while I am penniless," declared Tom.

He might have added also free from the clinging octopus of disgrace, but he wisely refrained.

A serious light for a moment dwelt in Nick's eyes as he leaned over the table, and, gazing at Tom steadily, said:

"Yet you in poverty may be far happier than I with my fortune."

Tom looked up quickly, but Nick's expression had changed and he hastened to add:

"But I would not have you infer that I am unhappy. True, I am at times lonely. I don't think I should ever know the meaning of that word if I could have my brother with me."

"Your brother?" exclaimed Tom. "Have you a brother?"

"I live in the belief that I have one somewhere in the wide world."

Tom looked mystified.

"I will explain," continued Nick, in a saddened voice. "Years ago my brother, who should be but two years younger than myself, was stolen away in infancy from his cradle. From that day to this not a trace of him has ever been found. The blow killed my mother and was a life-long grief for my father. Ah, it was a dreadful thing!"

"That was indeed dreadful!" exclaimed Tom, deeply interested. "Who could have committed so fiendish a deed?"

"We have never been able to form a correct idea. Many believed it the work of the nurse. Others attributed it to a wandering gypsy tribe. From that day to this it has been a great mystery."

"And could you find no clew?"

"Not the slightest."

"It is very strange."

"So it is. While my father lived, however, he never lost hope, and hourly prayed that his lost one would some day be restored to him."

"Then you believe that your brother is alive?"

"I do. Indeed, my father's last words were to the effect that I should ever keep a good lookout for him. Do you know, I have felt of late as if my brother was very near me."

Nick relapsed into a thoughtful mood. Tom did not interrupt it, but went on with his meal, assiduously. He soon finished eating and then both arose and retired to the reception-room again.

"When shall we have another game?" Tom asked as they were seated.

"Not until next week," replied Nick. "You will have plenty of time for practice. But that recalls to my mind an errand I have downtown. I have plenty time before dark, I fancy. Do you want to go along?"

"Would be delighted!" cried Tom, with alacrity.

A few moments later they were wending their way downtown together.

It was not to be supposed that one who had won such dis-

tingtion in a day as Tom Curtis had should escape notice. He saw that many eyes were upon him, and heard remarks made by street urchins to the effect that:

"Dere's der boss pitcher of der Stars. He's a phenom', an' don't yer forget it!"

Ordinarily Tom would have experienced no slight degree of pleasure in the reflection that fame was his own, but the uncomfortable dread of meeting an officer of the law at any corner obliterated this sensation.

Soon they had turned into a narrow street and stood before the mighty towering elevator, which was the property of Nick Duprez.

Nick placed a key in the lock of a lower door and said:

"Tom, you had better wait here. I have got to go to the top of the building, and as there is nobody here to work the lift I shall have to climb the stairs. I will return as soon as possible."

Nick vanished up a dark stairway, and instantaneous with his departure a great horror seized upon Tom Curtis.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE.

For the life of him Tom could not explain that awful sense of horror which crept over him.

He seemed in the presence of some unknown, mysterious peril. He could not resist the impulse to spring to the foot of the stairway and call for Nick to return.

But no answer came.

The young millionaire was beyond hearing. Tom strove hard to conquer the strange feeling, and had partially succeeded when the verification of his presentiment came.

Some five minutes had elapsed. Just about a sufficient length of time to enable Nick to reach the top story.

Instinctively Tom stepped out into the middle of the street and glanced upward. It seemed a fearful distance up to the tower so far above.

The sky above was fast growing somber with the waning of twilight.

Shadows were appearing in the street. But few people were in sight, and the vicinity was quite deserted.

It had already seemed to Tom like an age since Nick had disappeared. Why did he not return?

Had anything happened to him? Was this the explanation of the sensation which so overwhelmed Tom?

The orphan boy tried hard to collect his thoughts, which had fallen into confused shape. In this state of mind the fearful discovery was made.

Suddenly a faint odor in the room attracted Tom's attention.

It was like the dense, pungent odor of burning waste. Then around the corner of the elevator tower there came twisting, in a sensuous and serpentine manner, a thin column of blue smoke.

"Fire!" gasped Tom Curtis, with a mighty thrill. "My heavens! the building is on fire!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a slight explosion succeeded. Some of the clapboards on the tower near the ground were forced outward by the weight and force of the smoke and flame which had been smoldering underneath for hours.

A mighty column of red flame leaped up and encircled the tower. It was wonderful with what rapidity the fire made fearful devastating headway.

In a few brief seconds of time the whole building was illuminated with the glare of the mighty conflagration. The fire spread with lightning rapidity.

One wild cry pealed from the lips of Tom Curtis.

"Fire! fire!"

The cry was heard far down the street. Instantly people came running to the spot and a dash was made for the key to the fire alarm box.

Tom saw that the fire department was about to be summoned. Then he sprang into the building.

His startled voice went up the stairway in thrilling force. "Nick! Nick! For heaven's sake answer me! Where are you? The building is on fire! Come quickly for your life!"

Already the flames were entering the stairway. They were drawn thither by the powerful draught.

But no answer came to Tom's cry. Again and again he shouted.

Then a horrid fear seized him.

Had any accident befallen Nick? It was possible a case of foul play and the fire may have been the work of incendiaries. With this dreadful suspicion Tom hesitated no longer, but made swift action.

He sprang up the stairway, two steps at a time.

A great volume of smoke was rolling up behind him. He felt the draught and knew that the time was precious.

As he went upward he called Nick's name frantically. But no answer was made. What did it mean?

It seemed an interminable distance to the higher floors of the elevator. It seemed an age since he left the ground below.

Up, up he went. Now he was at the foot of the staircase which led into the topmost story. Here he shouted:

"Nick; are you up there? For the love of heaven, answer me!"

A voice came back.

"Ay! what is the matter?"

Then at the head of the staircase appeared Nick Duprez, with an expression of astonishment upon his face.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

But Tom had no need to answer the question. A mighty column of black smoke came sweeping up the stairway. A dull, thunderous roaring sprang into being below.

"Fire!" gasped Nick.

"Yes, the building is on fire!" cried Tom. "Quick, for your life, Nick!"

The young millionaire did not need further urging. He came down the stairs with a leap.

"Heaven help us, Tom! Can we get down out of here?"

"I hope so."

"By the stairs?"

"It is our only way."

Hand in hand they started to fly down the long stairway. But there was a thunderous report below and a volume of smoke, fearful in its density, came rushing upward.

It filled the shaft, and was so extremely forceful and dense that to attempt to descend through it would have been the height of folly. They would surely have suffocated ere half the distance had been traveled.

As a result, they were obliged to retreat into the loft. Nick exchanged startled glances with Tom.

"I fear we are lost!" he cried.

"But we must not give up. Is there no other way to descend?"

"No; except to leap."

"That is bad."

"Did no one see us enter the building?"

"I cannot say."

Nick sprang to one of the small windows and glanced down. The street was thronged with a vast crowd of people, and firemen were frantically endeavoring to get a stream on the blaze.

Mighty tongues of flame were shooting from the windows below, and the fire was fast making its way upward.

The building was dry, and, filled with inflammable material, would burn like old tinder. The position of the two young men was indeed one of thrilling sort.

A mighty groan escaped Nick.

"My soul, Tom, I fear we are lost!"

Tom Curtis was willing to admit that he had never been in a more desperate predicament in his life. Never had the chances for life seemed so small before.

There seemed absolutely no way for escape. The stairway was impassable. There was no fire escape.

Neither could a ladder very easily be placed against the building, for the fire department of Kirkwood owned no ladder of the requisite length. To leap was certainly out of the question.

Tom and Nick clasped hands in the mutual agony of their despair.

"I guess our end has come, Tom," declared the young millionaire, despondently. "I am sure that death will take us."

"No," declared the orphan boy, with grim resolution. "We must not give up."

"But what can we do?"

"There is some avenue of escape. We must find it."

Tom turned and ran to the window on the opposite side of the building. He saw the river far below.

But to leap into the water was out of the question for a long wharf intervened. At this wharf also was a schooner from which grain had been unloading. To leap would have been to fall upon the deck of this vessel or the wharf.

But even as he looked a wild cry escaped the lips of Tom Curtis.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BIRTHMARK.

Nick Duprez had quite resigned himself to die in the burning elevator. But Tom Curtis was not disposed to give up life so easily.

He saw the river and the wharf far below.

It was a frightful height and a man down below looked like a pigmy.

But Tom's gaze also encountered another object. This was a long, square box, or chute, which extended out from the side of the elevator.

He knew that it was used to load schooners with from the elevator. The grain was simply dumped into this shaft, or chute, and allowed to slide into a vessel's hold.

This chute was made adjustable and rigged with tackle and falls so that it could be adjusted to any floor in the elevator. As fortune had it, it was now on a level with the floor beneath.

"Come here, Nick! I have an idea!" he cried excitedly.

In a moment Nick was by his side.

"What is it?"

"Do you see the shaft?"

"Yes."

"Can we not descend by that?"

A wild cry escaped Nick Duprez's lips, and he clapped his hands excitedly.

"By Jove! Tom, how did you think of that?"

Tom had no sooner conceived his plan than he hastened to put it into action. He turned back into the loft.

A rope hung over a beam. Tom had considered it once before, but it was by far too short to have reached even half way to the ground.

But it would reach easily down to the shaft. This was all that Tom deemed necessary, so he hastened to make use of it.

It was not difficult to take a hitch around a beam with one end of the rope. Then the other end was left dangling out of the window.

"Are you a good climber?" asked Tom of Nick.

"Good enough to go down there," replied the young millionaire. "Go ahead and I will follow."

"No," replied Tom, quietly, "I am going to be last down. You shall go ahead. There is no time to lose."

"But you may be suffocated before I get down."

"That is my chance."

"But I prefer to take it."

Tom resolutely pushed Nick to the window.

"Go down that rope!" he said, with mock sternness. "Every moment of hesitation endangers our lives."

"All right."

Nick swung himself over the window-ledge and went, hand over hand, down the rope. A moment later Tom had the satisfaction of seeing him upon the grain shaft.

He lifted the window and Tom saw him vanish into the shaft. The mouth of the shaft was over the river, and the fall would be into the water.

But this had been discussed before the plan had been decided upon. Both Tom and Nick were good swimmers. The descent through the shaft was quite gradual and could be made as slowly as desired by a pressure with feet and hands upon either side.

Tom fancied he could see the shaft tremble as Nick made his way down through it. It seemed an interminable time before the young millionaire came into view and dropped into the water.

Tom saw him swim easily to the dock and draw himself out of the water.

He waited no longer, but lowered himself out of the window, and went down the rope nimbly.

He reached the window as Nick had done and sprang in upon the elevator floor. The mouth of the shaft was before him, but flames had shot up and were consuming the thin sheathing about its mouth.

Tom even fancied he could feel the shaft give way as he sprang into it and started to work his way downward through it. It was quite a long, slanting course, and all was as dark as Erebus in the place.

But Tom knew that Nick had passed safely through it, and believed that he could.

Undoubtedly he would have succeeded in doing so had it not been for one unexpected catastrophe. Perhaps he had traversed one-fourth of the length of the shaft, when he experienced a falling sensation.

Tom had just time to realize, with a thrill of horror, that the shaft had given way, and that he was being precipitated almost a hundred feet to the wharf below, when there was a terrible crash, a concussion, and he knew no more. Oblivion, deep and long, rested upon the brain of Tom Curtis, and when he came to, finally, a very different scene greeted his dimmed vision.

He was in a plainly furnished room with whitewashed walls, and he was reclining upon an iron cot-bed. A nurse, with a white cap, was bending over him, and he knew that he was in a hospital.

"Have I been hurt?" he asked, in a faint voice, as he strove vainly to clear his beclouded brain. "What is it? Why am I here?"

"Rest easy," said the skilled nurse, in a soft voice. "You will be better soon. Then we will tell you all."

A deep, dreamless sleep fell upon Tom. It was several days before he was able to think clearly. Then he looked up into the genial, handsome face of Nick Duprez.

"You are mending fast, Tom. Keep up good courage. I owe you for my life, for I would never have devised a way of escape from the elevator."

"But—I—how did I get hurt?" asked Tom, in a puzzled way.

"The shaft fell, and the concussion injured your head and broke a rib or two. You will soon be yourself again."

In a few moments weariness again overcame the patient, and Tom fell asleep again. As his head did not rest easily upon the pillow, Nick essayed to shift its position. As he lifted the patient the collar of Tom's shirt fell aside, exposing a part of his shoulder.

There, upon the white skin, was a curious mark. Nick Duprez saw it and the color instantly left his face and a gurgling gasp escaped his lips. For a moment he seemed likely to faint. Then he bent down and examined the mark, which was nothing less than a birthmark in the shape of a large, blue crescent.

Eagerly Nick Duprez examined the curious mark. Then he arose and there was a strange, subdued light in his eyes.

"I believe it true!" he murmured, in an ecstatic way. "This is heaven's work! How I would like to tell him now. But the time has not yet come."

With these mysterious words he turned and left the room, just as the nurse was coming in. And Tom Curtis, unconscious of an impending, mighty change in his career, slept on.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BOND OF FRIENDSHIP.

It was some while before Tom Curtis was able to think clearly, and to stand the strain of conversation.

But as his strength increased he was visited oftener by Nick Duprez, and they spent many hours in pleasant converse. In fact, the two seemed drawn together by a subtle bond more powerful than that of any ordinary friendship.

Although Tom Curtis was a stranger in Kirkwood, scores of people sent their cards in to him, for the young hero who risked his life in the burning elevator to save Nick Duprez could not remain unnoticed.

One day Nick lingered longer than usual, and the conversation took a turn, which awakened new and curious reflections in Tom's heart.

"You will be removed to the house in a few days," Nick said. "The doctor thinks it will be safe."

"What!" exclaimed Tom, in surprise. "To your house?"

"Yes."

"But I cannot consent to that. I have made trouble enough for you already."

What seemed like a spasm of pain crossed Nick's face. He took Tom's hand quickly and pressed it.

"Do you think that it can be other than a pleasure for me, Tom, to have you at my house?"

"Indeed, I can never repay you," Tom burst forth.

"Do you think I want pay? Do you think I can ever repay you for saving my life? Oh, Tom, there is a deep bond between us. Do you like me as a friend, Tom?"

The orphan boy was never more astonished in his life. He gazed at the young millionaire in a puzzled way.

"Of course I do," he replied.

"Do you think you could like me as a brother?"

Amazed, Tom was silent for a moment. Then a wistful light came into his eyes.

"I never knew the love of mother, father, brother or sister," he replied softly. "Oh, I would give much if I had a relative of some kind whom I could love."

A powerful wave of emotion seemed to surge over Nick. In a feverish manner he clasped Tom's hand tighter and cried:

"Oh, Tom! how would you like to call me brother? Could you love me as such?"

"You?" exclaimed Tom, in sheer amazement. "Why—I—that is, I like you very much. But you are not my brother."

Nick Duprez seemed to labor under a powerful wave of emotion. Then, with a mighty effort, he calmed himself and rejoined:

"Tom, I am deeply interested in you. It is no morbid curiosity which impels me, but my deep desire to help you. You have much in your past life that is sorrowful. Assume that I am your brother and unbosom yourself to me and I will swear to comfort you. I will be as near to you as a brother, until death."

Nick's utterances were delivered with a sincerity and a force which could not help but have a mighty effect upon Tom Curtis. For some while he was silent and gazed thoughtfully, almost yearningly into the other's face.

Then he drew a deep sigh and tears welled into his eyes, in spite of an effort to keep them back. He pressed Nick's hand tighter, and said:

"I do not know why it is that I am so strongly drawn toward you, but I already feel as if you were as dear to me as a brother could be."

A glad cry escaped Nick's lips.

"Oh, you cannot know how happy that declaration makes me!" he cried.

"But why," asked Tom slowly, "do you feel such an interest in me? I am almost a comparative stranger to you."

A singular expression crossed Nick's face.

"I cannot answer that question now. It is enough to know that I feel the deepest sort of an interest in you, Tom Curtis. You are not afraid to trust me?"

"Why should I fear?"

"Then let us trust each other and be friends for life."

A glad cry of acquiescence was upon Tom's lips, but he checked it. In that instant, like an awful great pall of horror, a flood of wretched memories surged over him. His conscience was far too sensitive to escape the lance of self-condemnation. His face changed and pain succeeded his transient joy.

He recalled the fact that he could never morally assert his rights to an equality with Nick Duprez. Was he not branded, disgraced? Was there not that fearful stain upon his character which even the friendship of Nick Duprez could not pardon? What would his new-found friend think or say if he knew the truth? Would he not turn from him with aversion, with shuddering pity and loathing?

In his present weakened state of mind and body, Tom was inclined, of course, to magnify the facts. This, added to his discomfort of spirit, made him feel like a real criminal.

But Nick Duprez was a sufficiently clever student of human nature to be able to read quite accurately Tom's mind. He knew that some heavy matter was upon it, and he was determined to know what it was.

His gaze met Tom's. The latter's eyes fell. It was Nick's opportunity.

"Tom," he said, in a low, suppressed voice, "I know that there is some matter of distress upon your mind. Do not fear to tell me what it is. You can trust me to the death. I can aid and comfort you. Rest assured I will believe no wrong charge against you."

Nick had used the right words. His astuteness had won the day. Tears sprang into Tom's eyes, and huskily he cried:

"I know I can trust you, and I will tell you all. There is a black stain upon my character, and I have feared to let you know what it was for fear that you would turn from me in loathing as the rest of the world has done."

Nick looked steadily at Tom.

"I know that you are guilty of no wrong," he said confidently.

"Then you will believe me. Thank heaven for that! Yes, Nick, I swear it. I am as innocent as can be of anything wrong."

"I believe you."

"Heaven is my witness."

"But—what is the wrong deed with which you have been charged?"

"The crime is that of incendiarism."

Nick gave a violent start and then asked seriously:

"Has some crank accused you of setting fire to his house?"

Tom, with this, told briefly the story of his life. He made no allusion, however, to his having received a confession from Ann Curtis' dying lips that he was not her own child. He depicted his experience with the Hastings family and his life in High Falls. Nick listened with deep interest.

"I know Colonel Montclair and his daughter well," he declared. "There is no doubt, Tom, but that this is all mean, vengeful work upon the part of the Hastings to ruin you. But it is a matter easily settled. I think I need only interview the precious pair to completely spoil their case. They can easily be induced to drop the case, I think. A little money will buy their souls."

An expression of positive pain crossed Tom's features, and the young millionaire was sorry the next moment for what he had said.

"No, Nick, I cannot agree to that!" cried the orphan boy firmly. "That would not be proving my innocence. I cannot consent to buy immunity from prosecution."

"Pardon me!" cried Nick hastily. "You are right. But there is a way to get you out of the scrape. The real incendiary must be found. I will put detectives on the case at once."

"Then you believe me innocent?" asked Tom eagerly.

"I do."

"I thank you for your kindness and your confidence. I have now more courage to face the foe."

Nick arose to leave the room. But at that moment the door opened and the sound of voices in altercation could be heard just over the threshold.

The faithful nurse was arguing with two men. One of them cried loudly and forcibly:

"You have no right to hinder me in the execution of my duty. I am an officer of the law. Stand aside!"

A light of terror shone in Tom's eyes, and he essayed to spring from his bed. But Nick held him back. Just at that moment two men forced their way into the room.

One was the constable, Jerry Powers, and the other was Bill Hastings.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ARREST.

"I am an officer of the law!" cried Powers pompously. "And I have a warrant for the arrest of Tom Curtis upon the charge of incendiarism."

At that instant his gaze alighted upon the form in the bed and as he caught sight of Tom's face an expression of triumph came into his own countenance.

This was also the case with Bill Hastings, who rejoined excitedly:

"Yes; and there he is, Jerry! Fasten right onto him. Now is the time. I don't keer a continental if he is sick a-bed. Likely he is jest shamming!"

Powers took a step toward the cot-bed as though he would enforce Hastings' command.

But Nick Duprez arose and confronted the villains like a young lion. His eyes flashed as he cried:

"Hold, you miserable hounds! If you dare to lay a hand on this sick boy you will only do it over my dead body!"

Duprez was a fine-looking youth and spoke with such an air of superiority and command that in spite of their bravado the two villains recoiled. Powers was the first to speak.

"You have no right to balk an officer of the law!" he declared.

"Are you an officer of the law?" asked Nick, with dignity.

"I am."

"What do you want here?"

"I have a warrant for the arrest of Tom Curtis."

"Upon what charge?"

"The charge of setting this man's barn on fire!"

"He is not innocent of that charge!" cried Powers doggedly. "The evidence is ag'in him and it'll hey to be settled in court."

"But you cannot arrest him now. He is an inmate of this hospital and cannot be moved."

"I can put him under bonds," declared Powers determinedly. "Then he will have to appear for trial."

"Very well," exclaimed Nick eagerly; "I will go on his bond. I will find a second bondsman also."

"That's all right, then," declared Powers stiffly. "But I

must serve the warrant. Tom Curtis, I arrest you in the name of the law!"

He went to the bed and touched Tom's shoulder as he spoke. Then he turned to Nick and said:

"You may seek the bail commissioner now and give the necessary security. The prisoner's deposition will do at the hearing."

"Very well, I will arrange that," declared Nick stoutly. "I wish also to inform you that I mean to employ the best legal talent in this country to defend the prisoner. It may be that Tom Curtis has heretofore been friendless. This fact, perhaps, has encouraged you in attacking him in this brutal way, but you shall find that he has one friend whom you cannot easily bluff, Bill Hastings. I believe I know you by repute, and I regret to say that I know little good of you. From motives of curiosity I would like to ask you why have you brought the accusation against this young man who has never harmed you?"

"Because it is the truth," declared Hastings sullenly.

"Dare you go into court and swear to that?"

"In course."

"Do you know the penalty of perjury?"

"Ye can't convict me of perjury," declared the villain doggedly.

Nick saw that it was utterly useless to argue with the wretch. His purpose was a doggedly determined one to ruin Tom Curtis.

However, he played upon the villain's fear as far as he could by declaring:

"You had better drop this now, Bill Hastings. I have money, and will spend a large sum to convict you of conspiracy. I shall certainly succeed. Beware!"

But Hastings only laughed contemptuously. Tom, with beaming face, managed to reach over and grasp Nick's hand.

"Heaven will bless you!" he uttered, in a choked voice.

"You are indeed the best friend I have ever known."

"I will stand by you to the death," replied Nick, in an undertone.

But at this moment the nurse and the physician of the hospital ward came in at the door. The indignant nurse had hastened for assistance.

"What is this!" exclaimed the physician angrily. "How have you dared to invade the room of one of my patients who is in a critical condition?"

Powers swelled up to his highest.

"By right of the law!" he declared pompously.

"There is no law which will give you that right!" cried the maddened physician. "The law of humanity, in fact, forbids it. What are you here for?"

"To arrest the man in that bed."

"Well, I forbid your serving upon him while he is in this condition. It might endanger his life. I warn you to leave the room."

Powers laughed scornfully.

"Not so fast, Mr. Pillmixer," he declared boisterously. "The warrant is already served."

The physician was a man of splendid physique. He stood silent a moment and glared at Powers.

"You have dared to invade my ward and serve a warrant on one of my patients here!" he said, in a voice of steel. "If I was to use my just prerogative I should kick you out of this hospital! There is the door. Get out this moment, or, law or no law, I'll certainly do it!"

Powers looked at the spunky physician a moment, critically. The brutal constable was a coward at heart, and he saw that there was more of earnestness in the doctor's manner than he would dare trifle with. Moreover, he knew that it was outraging public sentiment to invade the room of a sick man to serve a criminal warrant, and discreetly he chose to beat a retreat.

"All right," he snarled; "I've served the warrant, and the prisoner will have to give heavy bonds. I tell ye, Bill Hastings, I've done the best for ye I could. Come on, there's no need of our staying here longer."

The two villains passed out of the room. The doctor went to Tom's side and felt his pulse. There was a fever flush in his cheeks, and the doctor administered a light drug.

The nurse roundly scolded the departed interlopers, and Nick Duprez walked up and down the floor trying to think of some way to circumvent the foe.

Finally he paused by Tom's bedside, and said:

"But you needn't be afraid, Tom. You shall never go to prison, and I'll prove your innocence, if it takes my fortune."

With this he left the room. Tom finally fell into troubled sleep. He received no visitors until the next day.

The newspapers, instigated by the rascally Powers, came out with a scurrilous attack upon Tom's character. This incensed Nick, and he inserted in the evening edition a thorough expose of the brutality of Powers and Hastings, and eulogized Tom Curtis to the skies. To this he signed his own name.

Now, Nick was a popular young man in Kirkwood, and it was easy for him to turn the public sentiment against Tom's foes. They speedily found themselves in hot water whenever they ventured to attack him in words.

Bail was furnished to the amount of ten thousand dollars. Nick Duprez and another wealthy resident of Kirkwood were bondsmen.

Everybody was upon the qui vive now for the approaching trial. Public sympathy was strongly in Tom's favor, and a thrilling series of disclosures were anticipated when the case should be brought up in court.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRIAL.

The day of the trial was close at hand. Everybody was greatly excited, for the case was one of a sensational sort. There were few who believed in Tom's guilt. Others, more numerous, firmly declared him innocent.

All this while Nick Duprez had not been idle.

He had employed the shrewdest detectives in the country, and, as a result, some shrewd work had been done.

Yet, with all of the keenest investigation, the identity of the real incendiary who had leaped out of the haymow that day could not be established.

It was a deep mystery.

Hastings was known to have many enemies. It was more than likely that it was one of those who had fired the barn, but which one to fasten the guilt upon was a hard matter to decide.

Thus the case hung fire without important results until the very day of the trial came.

In vain Nick Duprez urged the detectives to more strenuous efforts. They already had accomplished herculean work.

Finally the hour of the trial came. The courtroom was crowded.

As the alleged crime had been committed at Woodvale, it was deemed necessary to try the prisoner there. Accordingly, the trial was held in the little courthouse there.

Tom, now quite well recovered in health, went down with Nick. Just as he reached the courthouse door a tall man seized his hand.

"Tom Curtis," said a sympathetic voice, "I can never quite forgive you for running away and leaving me, but, all the same, I am here to-day to lay down my life for you if it is necessary."

It was Col. Montclair.

By his side stood Annie, pale and agitated. She came nearer and, in tones which thrilled Tom, said:

"I know you are innocent, Tom. I am praying for your triumph. But why did you leave us, Tom?"

Tom's face was scarlet, although a delirious sense of happiness was upon him and his heart thumped against his ribs like a trip-hammer.

"I hope you will forgive me," he replied, with a tremendous effort at composure. "But—I—to tell the truth, I feared the disgrace would cause you to turn against me, and—I could not bear it."

"Why, Tom!"

There was a world of reproach in Annie Montclair's voice.

"Pardon me," exploded Tom, feeling very uncomfortable. "I never once doubted your friendship, you know, but—it was a terrible accusation."

"It was a villainous conspiracy!" cried Col. Montclair, in terms of denunciation.

But the court was opened and now the bondsmen were compelled to give up the prisoner. Tom took his seat in the dock, and experienced a strange faintness. It seemed to him a dreadful disgrace to be called before the bar of justice, even though he was innocent of any wrong.

Two able lawyers had been employed by Nick Duprez to defend Tom's case. Witnesses were called, and Mrs. Hastings took the stand first.

The counsel questioned her sharply in regard to the inci-

dents at the barn just before the fire. She made her replies in a terse and decided manner.

One might have detected a tinge of malice in her speech, but this was of no importance in the case. Next the counsel for the defense subjected her to a close cross-examination.

"You assert that the young man, while in your employ, was uncivil and disobedient?" asked the lawyer sharply.

"Yes, sir, I does," replied Mrs. Hastings flatly. "I sed so once before."

"Were you not in a measure tyrannical in your treatment of your employee?"

"No, sir, I was not," denied the virago. "I treated him jest as I would my own son."

The lawyer winced and shrugged his shoulders. It was evident that he did not credit this statement.

"Do you mean to say that Tom Curtis, the defendant, actually set fire to your barn?"

"I does."

"How do you know that?"

"I seen him do it."

"Ah, then you actually saw him touch the match to the hay?"

"I did."

"What did you do, then?"

"I ran up and grabbed his arm and tried to stop him."

"And he persisted in setting the fire?"

"Yes."

"That will do. Mr. Hastings will please take the stand."

The brutal farmer arose from his seat and mounted the stand. His manner was dogged and sullen, and he responded briefly to the questions applied to him.

"Were you present when your wife tried to restrain Tom Curtis from setting the haymow on fire?" asked the attorney for the defense.

"I had jest come up," was Hastings' reply.

"Ah! Then you did not actually see him set fire to the hay?"

"He set the hay afire."

"That is not my question. Did you see him set the hay on fire?"

"Well," stammered the villain, "Malviny saw him, and jest as I cum up he threw down the match."

"What did you do then?"

"I grabbed the young wilyun by the collar and giv' him a shakin' up."

"Then you did not try to put out the fire?"

"Yes, I did; but it burned like powder. Ye couldn't stop it."

"What did you do next?"

"Well, I couldn't do anything but watch the barn burn. Then Jerry Powers an' a lot of the neighbors came. Jerry, he arrested the young rascal an' we started for town with him to put him into jail. On the way he crawled out of the waggin an' got away from us."

"That will do. Tom Curtis, step up."

Tom was duly sworn and told his story in a straightforward manner. We will not dwell upon the summing up of evidence, arguments of counsel and charging of the jury which followed, suffice it to say that the jury went out and soon came in again with the verdict.

A hush like death fell upon the courtroom as the verdict was read:

"In view of conclusive evidence, the prisoner is found guilty of incendiarism in the first degree."

Then followed the judge's sentence.

"The prisoner shall serve the term of three years at hard labor in the State's prison. One day in solitary confinement."

Nick Duprez smothered a denunciation under his breath. Tom, pale, but with rigid calmness, held out his hand to his friend. The sentence seemed to him a death-knell to all his hopes for life.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMONG CONVICTS.

Nick Duprez gripped Tom's hand and said, in a determined voice:

"This is the most fearful wrong ever done one man by another, Tom. But don't lose courage. The right will prevail, and you will surely come out a winner. Bill Hastings

shall have no rest from this on. I will see that he is hounded for the rest of his life, if he does not confess his villainy."

"I thank you," said Tom, in a hollow voice. "It is my one atom of comfort, that you believe in me."

"Oh, my heavens! I cannot bear to think of your going to prison!" groaned Nick, with tears in his eyes. "Those Hastingses shall pay for this piece of villainy!"

But the officers had now come to lead Tom away. His first day in confinement was to be solitary.

During all the long years of his after life, whether in sorrow or in joy, Tom Curtis never forgot that first day in a prison cell.

At the expiration of the twenty-four hours, he was led forth and permitted to mingle with the other prisoners.

This was scarcely a betterment of his position, for Tom could hardly hope to find an affinity in the concourse of criminals of all sorts about him.

He was glad when placed at a bench with a number of other convicts to work upon leather, from which harness was made.

Before emerging from his cell, Tom had been subjected to the usual shaving process and had been given a suit of striped clothing.

A sharp pang entered his heart as he reflected that he was branded a convict, that, despite the fact that his innocence might some day be duly proved, he could never hope to gainsay that fact, that he had once worn convict's garb and worked in the prison gang.

It was a bitter thought, and haunted him day and night. It caused a dull weight to press upon his brain, and all the roseate hue of life was to him lost forever.

For a time Tom partly succeeded in drowning his misery in hard work.

He plunged into his duties so arduously that the foreman of the workroom speedily took a fancy to the quiet and modest young convict, No. 240.

"I don't believe that little chap is guilty of any wrong deed," he declared to a fellow-official. "I tell you, I'm a bit of a judge of human nature, and he's a gentleman born, if ever I saw one."

"Maybe so," agreed the other. "Well, Tim, if he keeps on he'll be likely to get a good commutation."

Tom had a few visitors on the proper days. Nick Duprez was sure to be on hand at every available opportunity, and Col. Montclair and Annie also came.

Many choice delicacies and interesting books found their way to young Curtis' cell, and he was the envied of other convicts.

But Tom went about his work steadily and with an habitual manner of sadness. At times he was despondent, but at no time did he lose sight of hope.

At Tom's bench there worked two cracksmen, who went by the euphonious names of Lame Bill and Whistler Jimmie.

The latter had a queer habit of continually indulging in a barely audible tremolo whistle, hence his curious cognomen.

Whistler Jimmie was a short, villainous-visaged chap, with a beetling brow and eyes of a peculiar, piercing black. He was, despite his looks, a jovial fellow, though sly and deceitful.

Lame Bill was a different type of rogue. While he had a peculiar faculty for theft, being a species of monomaniac, he was at the same time impulsive, generous and good-natured. It was his delight to pose as a modern Jack Sheppard.

He was continually bragging of his exploits and was fond of displaying his virtue by a claim that he never robbed a poor man or one who could not afford to lose.

Whistler Jimmie one day sprang a very good repartee upon him.

"Of course you would not rob a poor man, Bill," he cried, "for the very good reason, too, that you know well enough you'd get nothing from him."

This raised a laugh at Bill's expense, which the cracksmen took good-naturedly enough.

Singularly enough, these two adept rascals took a great fancy to Tom. It is said that a genuine rogue has a marvelous respect and liking for a man whom they know to be thoroughly honorable.

As they worked at the same bench, Tom naturally was constrained to be friendly with them, and he soon found himself yielding to the impression that even thieves possess elements of honor and even virtue.

One day Lame Bill ventured to ask Tom a question.

"If I may make free, mate," he said respectfully, "what

slip of the foot brought you here? It ain't often one see a youth of your sort in prison."

At first Tom was slightly averse to answering the question. But second thought impelled him to reply:

"I need keep it no secret. I was convicted wrongfully of firing a man's barn."

"Incendiary, eh?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all about it."

Tom proceeded to do this. The cracksmen listened attentively and an inscrutable light shone in his eyes as he gazed keenly at Tom.

The orphan boy did not understand an eccentricity of manner displayed by Bill at that moment, though it came to him later on. The cracksmen pursed his lips and exchanged glances with his pal, Whistler Jimmie.

"This here Hastings is a mean pup, anyway, I take it," he exclaimed as Tom finished. "It was a mean, put-up job on ye, my boy."

"So it was," agreed Jimmie.

"But don't ye fail to keep a stiff upper-lip. Ye'll live long enough to take it out of his hide yet."

"I only care to clear my reputation," replied Tom. "I do not seek revenge."

Lame Bill and Whistler Jimmie exchanged glances of surprise. They were wholly unaccustomed to such sentiments. They regarded Tom wonderingly.

And Whistler Jimmie muttered, under his breath, when Tom's attention was distracted:

"I've heard tell of good men, but I never seen one before what wouldn't do wrong. I reckon that lad will always do what is right."

While Tom claimed the liking and respect of both the cracksmen, they could not understand him. He was very much of a mystery to them.

Thus matters went on for some time. Then Tom became conscious of a great change in the conduct of the two convicts.

They conversed much in undertones, were reticent and slighted their work. Strange signs were exchanged by them with other convicts. Something was afoot.

Tom naturally began to wonder what this was. It was not easy, however, to solve the problem.

He kept his ears and eyes open, however. It was not a great while, though, before a revelation came.

One night, as they finished the lock-step march into the prison dormitory, Lame Bill managed to draw Tom aside and in a hushed voice said:

"Look here, boy, I've taken a fancy to ye, and I like ye. Now I'm going to do ye a good turn. We're in a scheme for an escape. Don't ye want to come in?"

Tom gave a violent start. A flood of curious reflections swept over him.

So this was the real solution of the mystery which had been so long in the air. Escape! It was a magic word and the impulse was upon him to eagerly grasp at the chance for freedom.

But there was a counteracting influence which held him back. With an effort he made reply:

"I thank you for your confidence. I will not betray it. But I choose to serve my sentence out. I think it better for me."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ESCAPE.

The convict, Lame Bill, appeared to be dumbfounded at Tom's assertion. For a moment he was stupefied.

"What!" he finally gasped. "Am I dreaming? Ye won't take a chance to escape?"

"I would rather not," replied Tom firmly.

"Do ye mean it?"

"I do."

"But," exclaimed the mystified cracksmen, "what do ye mean by it? Ye're the queerest fellow I ever heerd tell on. Why won't ye join us?"

"One moment," said Tom quietly. "What is your plan of escape?"

"Ye won't betray me?"

"No."

"Well, then, I'll tell ye. Do ye know the east gate?"

"Yes."

"Well, under that gate our boys have dug a cave. It has took eight months to do it. The entrance is from cell 42, on the ground floor, and is made by taking three loose stones from the prison floor. The dirt dug up has been carried every day out of the place by Tony Harrod in his pockets. It was a big job, I tell ye.

"Now, under that last gate the cave stops and a keg of gunpowder has been taken down there. It was stolen from the cellar. A match touched to a good fuse will ignite that powder and blow smithereens out of the gate. As soon as this is done we mean to make a break, fifty of us, and carry the guard away by main force, and once beyond the walls victory is ours."

Tom felt his cheeks tingle with the effect of this exciting plan. For a moment he was overcome with horror.

To his strict notions of honor it seemed altogether wrong to attempt such desperate work as the blowing up of the gate. It might mean the taking of human life, and he experienced much aversion to the plan.

At the same moment he inwardly felt it his duty to inform the warden of the scheme.

But Tom, while at school, had formed a strong dislike for anything which savored of tale-bearing.

"It would be too mean to betray these chaps who have confided in me," he reflected. "No, I'll not do that, yet I will not sanction the plot. My best plan is to keep wholly out of it."

And he informed Lame Bill of this decision.

The cracksman was silent for a moment, and then replied crustily:

"Well, I reckon ye hain't had much experience in life yet. P'rhaps ye'll think different some day. I kin only say ye are foolish. Of course, I only wanted to do ye a favor."

"I understand your motive," replied Tom, "and I thank you very much; but I cannot avail myself of the chance you offer."

This settled the question, and the matter dropped, so far as Tom was concerned. But the schemers were yet at work.

The explosion came while Tom was at his bench. All had been quiet enough a moment previous.

Then a tremendous, stunning shock was felt, the ground heaved, the walls of the prison trembled, and the air was filled with heavy masses of stone and wood and debris.

It was all over in an instant. The wall of the prison for a section of twenty feet on either side of the gate was down.

The terrified guards were flying about the yard in all directions. Consternation and confusion reigned.

It was the convicts' opportunity. The blow had been struck, and now the sequel was at hand.

Like the muttering of an oncoming tornado was the tumult which now came from every quarter of the prison.

The guards rallied, and were making for the breach in the wall. But as with one accord the convicts rose.

Lame Bill sprang up, grasping an iron bar. His voice rang out in clarion tones.

"Now we strike for liberty, and for our rights!" he cried. "Up, every man!"

It was a stirring moment. Tom's veins tingled, and he felt for a moment an inclination to assist the guards. But he refrained from so doing.

The prison officers formed a line at the breach in the wall. All were armed, but this did not deter the convicts.

They were desperate beyond restraint or fear. The convict, Lame Bill, with the heavy iron bar swung aloft, headed them.

The warden, seeing that a mere show of weapons would not stop the mass of desperate men, now gave the quick order:

"Fire! Shoot down every man who comes this way!"

The sharp report of the pistols followed. Tom grew sick and faint as he saw several of the convicts falter, stagger and fall.

But the rush was too great to be so easily stemmed. It was like a tidal wave, sweeping everything before it. Nothing could stay it.

Then the convicts collided with the guards. The air was filled with sharp, bitter cries and curses, the sound of blows and pistol shots.

But the convicts outnumbered the prison guards four to one. Of course, such odds had their effect, and the result was sharp, sudden and decisive. The guards were overwhelmed, and such as stood their ground were struck down.

With a wild, roaring cry, like the breaking of surf upon the beach, the escaping convicts cleared the wreck of the prison wall.

Down into the streets of the town they sprang. They cleared everything before them in that mad rush. People seeing the striped suits knew what had happened and the timid ones quickly got out of the way.

Until they were clear of the town the convicts kept together. Then they separated, going in various directions.

All had happened so quickly that Tom's presence in the prison yards as the sole remaining prisoner was quite unnoticed.

The guards who had escaped the fury of the convicts' attack did not linger on the spot. They ran down into town, vainly endeavoring to exhort the citizens to organize and assist them.

Left thus to himself Tom became the victim of a powerful desire. It was so strong as to threaten to overrule his former good resolutions.

The prison wall was down and he got a good view of the world outside.

He had been in prison long enough to fully test its monotony. Freedom never looked so dear, so inviting to him as now.

He walked to the breach in the wall. Nobody was about. There could be no better opportunity to escape. Liberty was in his grasp:

And liberty was sweet. How inviting the green woods and fields beyond the town looked. Freedom was there, happiness, and it was all within his grasp. All that was desired was a little resolution.

So excited was he that he could not reason clearly. One motive seemed to have taken possession of him. Why should he forfeit such certain happiness for a mere scruple of conscience, which might after all, be but a false sense of honor.

To hesitate is to lose, as some great authority has declared. So it was with orphan Tom Curtis.

Without stopping to consider consequences further, and merely desirous of securing his liberty, on the spur of the moment he leaped through the breach.

One of the guards lay dead, with a crushed skull, in the pile of wreckage.

It required some nerve, but Tom screwed his courage up to it and removed the dead man's coat and threw off his own striped jersey.

His pants were concealed beneath overalls. This disguised his convict garb and he felt safer than he ordinarily would have when he made a break through a side street for the open country beyond the town.

But as he cleared an angle in the prison wall Tom saw two men pursuing him hotly. One of them fired a pistol at him and Tom fell.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PURSUIT.

Simultaneous with the report of the pistol Tom fell.

The pursuers gave a shout of triumph, for they believed that they had bagged their man. But Tom was upon his feet the next instant.

The truth was the bullet had struck him, but had merely grazed his skull, stunning him for an instant.

He recovered almost instantly and was upon his feet. He now made a bold break for liberty, and nothing could have restrained him.

Now that the impulse was upon him no false scruples would have induced Tom to turn back.

He ran on, wildly, his pursuers still close in the rear. It was a desperate, mad race.

Soon the outskirts of the town were left far behind. They were now upon a country highway.

Just ahead was a dark patch of woods. Tom believed that if he could reach them he would succeed in eluding his persistent and dreaded pursuers.

In a few moments more the wood was reached. Tom deviated from the highway and plunged into the undergrowth.

Once more he was fired at but this time the shot went wild. He kept on at random, and finally coming into a beaten path heard the sounds of pursuit die out behind him.

He paused, finally, safe from pursuit, under a tall syc-

more tree. He was quite exhausted and sank down upon a bed of moss to rest.

A delicious sense stole over him. He was freed from the loathed confinement between prison bars. Freedom was his, and although it might be only a transient blessing this did not detract from its sweetness.

The cool air fanned his fevered brow. His strength came back and he was able to think more clearly.

Then he was appalled at the enormity of the day's incidents.

"Heavens!" he muttered, with a chill. "Who is responsible for the death of those four men who perished at the prison wall? Am I? It cannot be, for though I have followed the example of the conspirators and made my escape, I am by no means accessory to the plot."

Satisfied of this he was somewhat comforted. But next came the realization that his freedom was dearly bought, after all; that he must be forever a hunted man. Nowhere upon the face of the earth could he abide without fear of the law.

"Hang it!" he muttered. "I wish that Lame Bill had not attempted that fearful thing. I would have been much better off to have served out my sentence honorably."

The words had hardly left his lips when a startling sound brought him to his feet.

It was the clatter of horse's hoofs along the bridle-path. The next instant, and before he could conceal himself in the woods, horse and rider burst into view.

In this excitement Tom had not made the least bit of doubt but that it was somebody upon his track.

But an instant glimpse of the rider, however, caused him to change his mind.

A powerful, blood-bay horse came into view, and upon his back was a tall, fine-looking youth. Tom gave a quick gasp and fairly shouted:

"Nick Duprez! It is you!"

The horseman nearly fell from his saddle. He managed to pull his horse and stared at Tom as if he were a ghost.

"Tom Curtis!" he articulated. "It is not your ghost?"

"No, it is me in the flesh!" cried Tom, rushing up and grasping Nick's hand. "Of course, you are surprised to see me free!"

"Surprised!" ejaculated the young millionaire, "I should say that I am. What on earth does it mean? How came you here, Tom?"

"I escaped."

"What?"

"Have you not heard of the outbreak at the prison?"

"No."

Tom was surprised.

"Why, I supposed the whole town was aroused!" he cried.

"Ah, well, I have been out riding all day and was just on my way home. But you don't mean to say that there has been a riot at the prison?"

"Yes, I do."

"How did that happen?"

"Well, I'll tell you."

With this Tom proceeded to give the details of the whole affair. Nick listened with the deepest of interest. When Tom had finished he was silent a moment.

"Well, I hardly know how to advise you," he said after a while. "But still as long as you are at liberty, if there was a fair chance to prove your innocence, I should advise you to remain so."

"Oh, if there was only a chance to prove my innocence!" cried Tom excitedly.

Nick was thoughtful a moment. Then he said:

"There is no hiding place anywhere, Tom, than here. Not two hundred yards from here is a small cabin. If you will remain there for a time I will fetch up provisions to keep you. What do you think of it?"

"I am agreeable!" cried Tom eagerly. "Anything is better than prison life. But you are very kind, Nick."

"Pshaw! I owe you more than I can pay with ease. Come with me and we'll look at the cabin."

Tom followed Nick along the path to a small clearing. The cabin in question was quite neat and snug, and Tom concluded that it would not be the worst place in the world to remain hidden.

So it was decided that Nick should bring up some provisions, and Tom would remain secluded here for some time. Nick mounted his horse to leave when startling sounds broke forth upon the woodland air.

Down the path came hurrying sounds of footsteps. The next moment into the clearing burst six of the convicts. At

their head was Lame Bill, and Whistler Jim was at his shoulder.

Tom gave a gasping cry. But Lame Bill, spying him, cried:

"I'm afeard the game is up. We're all surrounded by the vigilantes and the prison guards, and we'll have to make a stand here. Into the cabin, every man of ye! Go in there, Tom Curtis, and you, too, stranger!"

"No!" cried Tom Curtis, in remonstrance, and Nick essayed to mount his horse. But the whole six convicts piled onto them and they were dragged into the cabin and the door was barricaded.

The next moment the rattle of firearms was heard and the thud of the bullets were audible in the log walls of the cabin. It was a moment of thrilling peril, and Tom Curtis, as well as Nick Duprez were at their wits' ends for an expedient to escape from their captors.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHY NOT BE BROTHERS?"

Lame Bill flourished a revolver over his head and yelled: "Let 'em come on! There'll be blood shed afore they take me. Every man do his duty, now. All hangs on this fight!"

Several of the convicts had revolvers, which they had probably seized from the guards in the fight at the prison. As Lame Bill had declared, blood was sure to be shed.

There was no doubt but that the cabin was surrounded by a large crowd. What the six convicts could hope to do against them was a question.

Tom turned to Nick and whispered:

"For heaven's sake, Nick, what shall we do?"

"We are helpless just now," Nick admitted. "I wish we had both got onto my horse and rode away."

The truth was, Nick's horse had been sent careering, riderless, into the woods by the convicts. There seemed to be no way of escape from the cabin. They were literally surrounded by their pursuers.

The truth was, the guards at the prison had organized an armed band of citizens for a pursuit.

For a little while the convicts led them a good chase. But being unfamiliar with the country, they had run into what was practically a trap.

Again the crack of firearms was heard and bullets rattled against the cabin. Then a stentorian voice shouted:

"Hello, the cabin!"

"Well?" returned Lame Bill at a window.

"Will you surrender?"

"What are your terms?"

"Unconditional."

"Never!" yelled the convict, fiercely. "We'll die with our boots on! Come on, the whole pack of ye!"

This was the signal for an attack upon the cabin. Half a hundred men rushed out of the woods.

Such of the convicts as were armed were stationed at the windows. At the assailants' approach, Lame Bill yelled, with fiendish emphasis:

"Give 'em the cold lead, boys! Don't let one on 'em escape!"

In obedience to this command the convicts fired. It was with deadly effect, too.

Several of the attacking party fell, but this did not stay them in their attack. On they came, and now several of them were endeavoring to batter in the cabin door.

Lame Bill seemed a fiend incarnate. He recklessly exposed himself, and, in fact, seemed not in the least to fear death.

In spite of his ruffianly character, Nick and Tom could not help but admire his bravery. Once he turned his gaze upon them.

"Come, young fellers!" he growled, fiercely, "it means the rope for you as well as me. If ye're bright, ye'll take hold and help fight, too. No shirks here!"

For the sake of personal safety both Nick and Tom pretended to comply. But they fired their shots in the air and took care that they should be without effect.

The pressure upon the cabin door seemed likely to break it in. A state of the most indescribable excitement followed.

The convicts resisted furiously. They even fired through the panels of the door, and as their comrades fell they trampled over their bodies to repel the foe.

It was certain that the citizens and vigilantes would have had no easy conquest had it not been for the fact that the ammunition possessed by the convicts was limited.

When this began to give out then it became a hand-to-hand struggle. The result was that the odds began to tell and the convicts yielded, but Lame Bill fought until covered with wounds.

Not until he was borne to the ground, unconscious, did he yield. Then he was carried from the scene on a stretcher.

A number of the gang were dead, and nearly all were wounded.

In the excitement Nick was also taken back to the prison with Tom. But he was speedily released as soon as his identity was proved.

No charge could be made that he was engaged in aiding any of the convicts in escaping. He gave a plausible excuse for his presence in the hut, and he was at once discharged from custody.

But before he left he went to Tom in his cell.

"Oh, Tom!" he declared, "how I almost wish that you might have kept your liberty."

"Ah!" replied the orphan boy, "I fear it would not have been for the best. No, Nick, I think I would do better to serve out my sentence."

"But it is so unjust!"

"True, yet it is the inevitable. I am happy only in one thing, and that is, that I have so kind a friend as you."

"Tom," said Nick, in a choking voice, "you never need fear but that I will always stand by you."

"But the world's opinion," said Tom, bitterly. "What is a man robbed of his honor?"

"Ah, I tell you the day will come when you will be proven innocent, Tom."

"I pray that it may."

"You shall not serve out the full extent of that cruel sentence."

"How can I help it?"

"For good conduct and extenuating circumstances, with the aid of a few influential friends, you can be almost sure of a commutation."

An eager cry escaped Tom's lips.

"Oh, do you believe that?" he cried.

"Certainly."

"How much of a commutation is usually allowed?"

"Sometimes one-half the sentence."

"Oh, I dare not hope for that!"

"Listen," said Nick, earnestly: "My uncle is a very wealthy and influential man. He is well acquainted with the Governor of this State. I have no doubt that he can, in time, get you a commutation of sentence."

"Oh, Nick!" cried Tom, in very exuberance of feeling. "I can never half repay you for your kindness to me."

"You cannot know how much pleasure it gives me to be able to do you any favor," declared Nick. "I like you, Tom Curtis—I only wish I could say that you were my own brother."

A flood of light burst across Tom's face. He sprang to his feet.

"Nick!" he exclaimed, impressively, "somewhere in this world I may have a brother or a sister, or perhaps other relatives. Oh, that my foster-mother could have lived long enough to tell me about them!"

"Then you know positively nothing about your antecedents?" asked Nick.

"Nothing whatever."

"It is a pity that you have nothing by which you could be identified."

"Too true," replied Tom, bitterly.

Nick advanced and threw an arm about the orphan boy's waist.

"Tom Curtis," he said, warmly, "why can we not affiliate? I like you well enough to call you my brother. I, like you, am now an orphan, my father having recently died. Would you like to be my brother?"

Tom eagerly gazed into Nick's eyes.

"That would make me happier than all else in the world!" he declared.

A great impulse was upon Nick Duprez. He would have spoken startling words, but just at that moment an interruption came.

The turnkey appeared at the cell door and said:

"Number Nine, you are requested by the warden to accompany me to the hospital. Number Twenty is dying, and has a confession which he says he will make only to you."

"Number Twenty!" exclaimed Nick.

"Why, that is Lame Bill!" cried Tom.

"That is the chap," declared the turnkey. "He is pretty low, and you had better hurry or you won't hear it, I fear."

Tom needed no second bidding.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONVICT'S CONFESSION.

"A confession!" gasped Tom, in sheer amazement. "What can it be? But Bill was always in the habit of telling his affairs to me. Yes, I will go."

The cell door swung back and Tom walked out. The turnkey made no objection to Nick's going along also, so the three descended the stairs, crossed the prison yard and reached the door of the prison hospital.

As they entered the warden met them and conducted them into the small room, where, upon a cot-bed, reclined the dying convict.

It required not a second glance to see at once that Lame Bill was near his end.

The hollow, sunken cheeks, glazed eyes and pallid hue were all evidences of approaching dissolution. His breathing was short and labored.

As the visitors entered the convict seemed to brighten up.

He beckoned to Tom, who at once went to his side. The dying convict's face softened strangely as he laid his hand upon Tom's arm and gazed almost appealingly into his eyes.

"Boy," he said, huskily, "ye did think enough of me to come and see me when I sent for ye with the word that I was surely going to die."

"It pains me to think of such a thing," said Tom, seriously.

The dying man gazed penetratingly at the youth.

"Is that really the way ye feel, boy?" demanded Lame Bill.

"Will ye really feel a bit bad to know I'm dead?"

"Indeed I shall," replied Tom. "And I tremble when I think of such a man as you facing his Maker."

The convict was deeply affected.

"I know I've been a hard un in my day," he declared; "and there's heaps laid up ag'in me. But I've been a man more nor once in my life."

"I have no doubt of that," replied Tom. "It is sad to think that all your life might have been made up of just such noble deeds."

A burning light was in his eyes.

"Boy!" he exclaimed, earnestly, "if I had my life to live over again I'd live it jest that way. But it's too late now. I've got to give a clean account of what I've done and trust in luck for the rest. I can't help it now. But I know you're a good boy, an' I've had heaps of respect for you, lad. Before I die I'm going to do you one good turn. Understand me?"

"Do me a good turn?" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes. P'rhaps ye think that queer, but I kin do it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, first of all, you wouldn't be here now if it wain't for a piratical bit of scheming, would ye?"

"By no means."

"That's it. It's a condemned shame, and I'd turn in my grave if I died thinking I didn't make a move to help ye."

"To help me?"

"Yas; an' I kin do it, too. P'raps you think I don't know that wolf of a cuss, that Bill Hastings, and his she-cat of a wife, Malviny."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Tom, in amazement.

"Ye told me all about your trouble, one day, don't ye mind?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, I'll surprise ye by telling ye a little experience I had with the dirty dog."

"Ah!"

"Ye see, I had a little house-breakin' job up in Connecticut, an' I let Bill in on shares. I never took much to Hastings. I never liked that kind, but I was out of a pal just then."

"Well, we went up to Connecticut, and I did the heft of the work myself. Bill, he didn't take any risks, an' jest shirked all he could."

"I fetched out six thousand dollars in money and diamonds from one house, and left 'em in his hands, while I went back arter more."

"What do ye think the mean cuss did? When I got back he wasn't to be found, hide nor hair, an' I didn't diskiver

where he'd gone to for two weeks. Then I heard of him down home.

"Of course, I was mad, an' I went down there for a settlement. D'ye know, he laughed in my face an' jest swore that I was dreaming, and that I never give him the stuff at all. He was mean enough to keep the whole boodle, and I then and there swore I'd be square.

"I went back after a time and skulked about his place. I slept in the haymow one night, made up as a tramp. I remember seeing you there. It was I who set the barn on fire, an' I did it for revenge. In course, I felt sorry when I heard an innocent man had been took up for it.

"But I couldn't do anything to help ye. Now I can clear ye of the charge that keeps ye here. Fetch paper and ink an' I'll make my 'davy to it, too. Boy, afore twenty minutes I'll make ye free, an' I'll die happy with knowing that I've done one good act in life."

All by the dying convict's bedside listened with amazement to this declaration. Tom could hardly believe his senses.

He remained with Lane Bill's hands in his while the turnkey hastened for paper and writing materials.

"I knew that some day my innocence would be proven," Tom said, in a softened tone. "Bill, I shall never forget you for this act of kindness."

"I knew ye'd understand it, boy!" cried the convict. "I couldn't come out an' declare that I had done the job. My word wouldn't have been taken arter the oaths of Hastings and his Malviny. But a confession on a death-bed has got to be accepted. It's my last act on earth an' I'm glad it's a pious one."

Nick Duprez had listened to all with a thrill of joy. He managed to whisper in Tom's ear:

"You don't know how happy I am to know that you are cleared. But I've got better news yet in store for you."

Tom looked up in surprise, but Nick rejoined:

"Not now. Wait until we are away from here."

Writing materials were now produced and Lane Bill dictated his confession to having fired the barn of Hastings, and signed the affidavit, being sworn by the warden. Then the others also signed as witnesses.

Then Tom went back to his cell. The confession was carried before the necessary authorities without delay. Action was almost immediately made.

The judge of the criminal court authorized the discharge of the prisoner in face of this evidence. And Tom emerged from prison only to enter Nick Duprez's carriage and be driven to the house of his staunch friend.

But an hour later the news reached them that Lane Bill had breathed his last. Nick Duprez, with characteristic sympathy, had provided a pleasant lot in the cemetery, with an appropriate headstone for the grave, so that the dead convict might not rest in a nameless grave.

The joy of Tom Curtis was beyond description when it was fully established that he was cleared of the foul stain which had so benighted his young life.

Two days after his liberation from prison Nick drew him into the library of his palatial home.

"Tom Curtis, what would you think if I should tell you plainly and emphatically that you are really my own brother?"

Tom Curtis was never so astonished in his life.

CHAPTER XXI.

BROTHERS UNITED—THE END.

At first Tom was disposed to treat this astounding statement as a joke. He affected a smile.

"That will do, Nick."

"No, I am serious."

"What!"

"I mean every word I say, Tom. You are really and truly my own brother."

It was easy to see that Nick was in earnest. A light shone in his eyes, such as Tom had never seen there before.

"I have not said anything to you of the fact heretofore," Nick continued, "for certain good reasons. But I have now undeniable proof."

Tom drew a deep breath.

"Perhaps it is all a dream," he muttered. But Nick interrupted him.

"Do you remember, Tom, when you were in the hospital how I visited you and you told me the story of your life?"

"Yes," replied Tom.

"Very well. I have since been hard at work and I have discovered, beyond all doubt, that you are identical with my long-lost brother."

Tom arose to his feet and gazed at Nick in a strange, yearning way.

"Can it be?" he exclaimed, in a husky voice. "I cannot believe my senses. And yet it would explain the singular feeling I have had toward you—a feeling I have never felt toward any other living being."

"That is it!" cried Nick. "It was that feeling which, after hearing your story, gave me a suspicion that we might be brothers. Oh, Tom!"

"Nick!"

They rushed into each other's arms and embraced. Then Tom stepped back, and, in an incredulous way, said:

"But I cannot yet believe such good fortune. There must be a mistake somewhere. How do you know it?"

"Wait a moment!"

Nick stepped to the door of an inner room. The next moment a woman of elderly appearance entered.

"Mrs. Leary, I will introduce you to Mr. Tom Curtis. At least that is the name he has borne heretofore. With your assistance I will try and prove that it is not his right name."

Mrs. Leary curtsied to Tom, who regarded her wonderingly.

"Mrs. Leary is the nurse who was caring for my infant brother at the time he was kidnapped," declared Nick. "I thought she might be able to identify him."

"Of course, the baby is now a man grown," said the old nurse. "But yet there is one mark by which I think I should know little Arnold, your baby brother, Nick."

"What is that?" asked Nick.

"Upon his little shoulder there was a singular birthmark. It was nothing less than a well-dented blue crescent."

A quick, sharp cry escaped Tom's lips.

"Why," he cried, eagerly, "there is such a mark upon my shoulder!"

"Let me see it," said the old nurse, with great eagerness.

Tom instantly removed his coat and bared his shoulder. There was the blue crescent sharply defined. Mrs. Leary nodded her head and said:

"I've heard of people being marked alike. Now little Arnold once walked into a scythe blade, which left a deep cut on his ankle. I always considered that a scar for life."

"I have a scar like that!" cried Tom.

He pulled down the upper edge of his stocking and there, above the ankle, was revealed the livid scar. Mrs. Leary gave one glance at it and then cried:

"It's enough, Mr. Nick. I can see the Duprez resemblance in his face. May the Lord love us all, he is your own lost brother. Oh, if his father could have lived to see this day!"

Nick threw both arms about Tom and cried:

"My own dear brother! I cannot tell you how happy I am to have found you. We will never be separated. Half of the fortune left by father belongs to you. Your hardships are at an end, Tom, and you have conquered your enemies; ay, even fate itself!"

Why need we dwell on the happiness of Tom, the poorhouse boy? He had never dreamed of such joy, but he accepted it gracefully, and realized that after all his thrilling hardships he had at last been given a chance, and this time it was all synonymous with life-long joy and success.

Quite a sensation was created in the town when it was reported that the discovery had been made that the orphan boy, Tom Curtis, was really the long-lost son of Arnold Duprez.

Among those who early called with congratulations were Tom's kind friends from High Falls, Col. Montclair and his pretty daughter, Annie.

The latter gave Tom a smile as she took his hand, which thrilled him through and through.

"I knew you was not guilty, Tom," she said, warmly, "and you don't know how happy I am that you are cleared."

Tom did not forget Sam and Sarah Wilkins, the kind, country people who befriended him, and repaid the ten dollars loaned him by Sam, with generous interest. Thus, honorable in all things, unswerving in his sense of right, Tom had surmounted all difficulties, overcome his foes, and compelled an unwilling fate to at last give him a chance.

Next week's issue will contain "JACK AND I; OR, THE SECRETS OF KING PHARAOH'S CAVES."

HELP YOUR COUNTRY!

WHAT WE FIGHT.

"The war was begun by the military masters of Germany, who proved to be also the masters of Austria-Hungary. These men have never regarded nations as peoples, men, women and children of like blood and frame as themselves, for whom governments existed and in whom governments had their life. They have regarded them merely as serviceable organizations which they could by force or intrigue bend or corrupt to their own purpose. They have regarded the smaller States, in particular, and the peoples who could be overwhelmed by force, as their natural tools and instruments of domination. Their purpose has long been avowed.

"If they succeed they are safe, and Germany and the world are undone; if they fail, Germany is saved and the world will be at peace. If they succeed, America will fall within the menace. We and all the rest of the world must remain armed, as they will remain, and must make ready for the next step in their aggression; if they fail, the world may unite for peace, and Germany may be of the union."

—WOODROW WILSON, President of the U. S.

WE MUST FINISH THE WORK.

"With the first installment of the Liberty Loan completed, immensely gratifying as is the result, we must remember that the financing of a great war is never completed until the war is finished; and we are going to finish this war to our satisfaction in order that America may not be finished. We must stay on job and do it in true American fashion. We have proved ourselves on the first test; we must be prepared for the second, the third, and the fourth if need be.

"This war must be fought to a finish. It must be so fought, because there is an irrepressible conflict between two irreconcilable principles and systems of organized society that never will be settled until it is fought to a finish. The world can no longer survive half democratic and half autocratic. One or the other must triumph. We are confronted to-day with an analogous situation to that which confronted this nation in 1861, when the immortal Lincoln said, 'This nation can no longer endure half slave and half free.' We had to fight that irreconcilable issue to a conclusion, and we fought it to a right conclusion. We vindicated freedom in America; we obliterated slavery from the free soil of this great nation. That is what we have got to do for the entire world—destroy despotism, which

is another form of slavery, and make liberty supreme. In no other way can the world be made safe for democracy. It is a noble deal; it is the only kind of an ideal for which a great republic like ours, a republic of freemen, could or would fight."—William G. McAdoo, Secretary of the Treasury.

HOW ENGLAND SAVED

In strong contrast to their neighbors, the French across the English Channel, the masses of the English people a few years ago were proverbially a spendthrift rather than a saving race. But the great war has wrought a change.

In the year 1916 although purchasing billions of dollars of war bonds the small savings banks depositors in England increased their deposits over sixty million dollars.

It was patriotism that started this great change in the people of the nation. The English people started saving their money because they saw that it meant saving England. But thrift and economy begot thrift and economy. They economized and saved for their own sake as well as for England's sake. Not only did they save money, but they economized in food, in fuel, in dress, in luxuries. More than one million English workers were purchasers, out of their savings, in the second great war loan of Great Britain, and eight million subscribed to their last war loan.

The question whether the civilian population should economize and do without certain things or the soldiers and sailors be denied things necessary for their effectiveness and safety was answered in no uncertain or unpatriotic way by the masses of the English people. They did their bit in financing their country.

Neither in ability nor in patriotism are the American people second to the English or the French or the German or any other nation. The Liberty Loan is at once an appeal and a pride. It appeals to their patriotism and their civic pride; it is an opportunity to save and an opportunity to serve their country.

No American need fear that the results of the American people's support of the Liberty Loan will fail to maintain America's traditional patriotism and power. The more than four million subscribers and the more than a billion over-subscription to the first issue of the Liberty Loan Bonds are eloquent testimony of the American people's loyalty to their Government and their willingness and ability to give it full financial support.

OUT FOR MONEY

—OR—

A POOR BOY'S CHANCE IN A BIG CITY

By J. P. RICHARDS

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER XI (Continued).

"Thankee," said the man. "That'll suit Bill all right."

Then he went away, and Phil started for home, wondering what Williamson wanted to tell him.

"Why didn't he say something about it the other night?" he thought. "If he broke his leg it's funny how he got away so quick. I wonder what he knows? It's a queer sort of business, but I guess it's all right."

"When he reached Mrs. Mulligan's he told the good woman of getting the note from Williamson, as he knew the man, and said:

"It looks kind o' crooked, missus, but I guess it's all right to go. Did you ever hear Mother Judy say anything about me?"

"No, indeed, and it's little traffic I hov wid the likes ave her, th' ould vilyan."

"Yes, I know, but I thought she might have said something."

"She was a naughty, bad old woman," piped up Bess, "and anything she said wasn't so."

"Thru for ye, dear," laughed Mrs. Mulligan. "And so ye think this maraudher wid his blarneyin' ways might tell ye something about persilf?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"He's a naughty bad man and set the house on fire," put in Bess, "and I wouldn't have nothing to do with him."

"I suppose he'll tell you that you've some rich buy's son, an' den you'll be away an' give us the shake," said Kitty.

"Yes, I will, an' t'row stones at it, dat's what I'll do."

"Kitty Mulligan, av yez tock like thot I'll take a strap to yez," cried the mother. "Yez hov no sinse intirely."

"Ah, well, when he gets ter puttin' on airs, he makes me so mad I could like him," snapped Kitty. "Let him go over dere an' get his head broke, I don't care."

"Yez do, yez knows yez do, an' yez hov a right to talk wid more sinse."

"Ah, go on, Kit, don't get mad," said Phil. "If I was to find out that I was rich you'd be as glad as anybody to know it."

"Well, you needn't go to shakin' us if I would," replied Kitty, who did not like to give in too soon.

"Go on, you know I wouldn't," said Phil. "Don't be foolish, Kit."

"I know, you're jealous of the nice lady uptown," said Bess, "but you needn't be, for she won't get

him, nor you, either. I'm going to marry him myself."

"Wud yez hark to th' ould-fashioned talk av her?" laughed Mrs. Mulligan. "Niver mind, dear, yez'll have a foine husband wan av those days, aven if it isn't Phil, darlint, and now let's have tay before it gets cowld."

After supper Phil started to go over to West street to see Williamson.

The man's promise to tell him something about himself excited him and made him less careful than he would have been at another time.

At the park he met Butts, who said:

"Hallo, Phil, where are you goin', to de t'eyter or to make a call at de Waldorf-Castoria?"

"Neither," laughed Phil. "I'm going over on West street to see the man who was at the house last Sunday night."

"What, de feller who set de place on fire?"

"Yes, he broke his leg that night, and wants to see me."

"I wouldn't go if I was you."

"Oh, yes; it's all right."

"Well, I wouldn't, dat's all."

"Oh, bother; it's all right, I tell you."

Then Phil started across the park, and Butts, taking care not to let himself be seen, followed.

"I don't believe it's all right," he muttered. "Dat feller is no good, and if he's sent fer Phil he means ter do him up; dat's what."

Phil walked at a good steady pace, and reached the address given him at about the time he had promised.

The place was an old-fashioned two-story-and-a-half story corner house, with a very steep peaked roof in which there was a dormer window.

The entrance was on the side street, and Phil rang the bell and asked to see Mr. Williamson.

"Right upstairs, front," said the girl who answered the door, and the boy walked up, rapped at a door, and was bidden to enter.

When he went in he saw Maynard, who stepped at once to the door and locked it.

CHAPTER XII.

IN DESPERATE STRAITS.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Phil. "I thought you had a broken leg."

"No; that's all right," said Hiram. "I locked the door so as not to be interrupted. Folks come in sometimes when I don't want 'em."

"You're lying to me," said Phil, looking around. "You lied about your leg, and you're lying now. I don't believe you can tell me anything about my history."

"Well, I don't know," laughed the man. "Sit down. First place, your name ain't Phil Hunt any more than mine is Bill Williamson."

(To be continued.)

CURRENT NEWS

Girl bathers on the beaches at Washington and Berkeley Lake Parks, Denver, Col., have devised a painless tattoo system for displaying the initials of their favorite suitors, who have answered the country's call for war. On their dimpled arms they have applied the initial cut out in court-plaster. The action of the sun in tattooing their shapely arms leaves the initial imprinted strikingly.

The Quartermaster Corps has completed plans for the construction of two central supply depots for the army, one at Harrisburg, Pa., and the other near Richmond, Va. The structures will cost about \$400,000 each. The depot at Harrisburg will be upon the site of Camp Meade, which was used in the Spanish-American War. This will be used as a distributing point for aircraft, wireless apparatus and lighter ordnance.

Senator Smoot, a member of the Finance Committee of the Senate, has stated that the cost to this country of the war, in actual expenditures will reach the stupendous figure of \$17,000,000,000 for the first twelve months. The army estimates are based upon the organization, equipment and sustenance of an army of 2,000,000 men. This includes the regular army, 387,000; National Guard, 400,000; National army, 500,000; auxiliaries, 100,000, and the second quota of drafted forces.

Camps for mountain climbers in Vermont have to be made porcupine-proof, as well as fireproof, for the Canadian species of the sharp-haired rodent (*Eethizon dorsatus*) strays across the border in search of tender birch bark, and is often found rusticated in modern camps in Northern New England. It is because of the prevalence of these curious animal on the heights of the Green Mountains that the camp recently established on Killington Peak, in the town of Sherburne, and the second highest mountain in Vermont, has been constructed of galvanized iron.

Official information received in Washington is to the effect that the entrance of the United States into the war has caused great changes in the German plans for her submarine campaign. After furnishing Austria with a sufficient number of submarines for that nation's needs, Germany has withdrawn entirely from the Mediterranean and is concentrating every effort upon the one object of stopping British, French and American troops and supply ships in the Atlantic or North Sea. A diminished number of submarines, of German build, but manned entirely by Austrians, are in service in the Adriatic and Mediterranean, but their offensive opera-

tions have been greatly curtailed. Italy maintains large fleets of submarine chasers and holds this weapon to be only inferior to destroyers and airplanes in combating submarines.

Vast amounts of North American capital have engaged in the meat trade for many years, and it is significant that most of these great financial firms and groups have now obtained a strong hold on the industry in Argentina, and it is further significant that similarly they are at work in organizing new factories and breeding establishments in Brazil and Uruguay, while intelligently inquiring into the pastoral resources of Venezuela and Central America. In Brazil, as an instance of this, it is stated that the Armour Packing Company has just established a plant at Santa Anna do Livramento, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, the erection of which is now proceeding. They are also establishing a factory in the neighborhood of Sao Paulo. It is said that both these establishments will be very substantially built and equipped on the most modern lines, provision being made for the considerable future development which Armour's anticipates with confidence. The capital investment involved by these two enterprises is over one million sterling. Thus it may be assumed that the cute Yankee cattle expert foresees an early transfer of his business to the South American sphere.

A huge raft of Oregon pine logs, 600 feet long and 52 feet wide, was towed 1,000 miles from an interior point on the Columbia river in Oregon, via the Pacific Ocean, to San Diego, Cal., where it is converted into lumber for the use of the United States Army and for shipbuilding purposes. The lumber is distributed throughout the Southwest. These rafts are floated down the Pacific during the months of July, August and September, when the ocean is as placid as a mill pond. Each raft contains from four million to six million feet of lumber; the logs are from 80 to 100 feet in length and measure as much as four feet in diameter. The raft draws 24 feet of water and stands 12 feet above the surface. It is held together by 64 chains of tested steel links, which are wrapped round its circumference. Longitudinally it contains an immense chain of links, measuring 2 1-4 miles. The latter is the tow chain by which the enormous raft, as long as three city blocks, is dragged through the ocean to its destination, by a sturdy but insignificant ocean-going tug. Over 200 tons of iron are used in the chains that hold these rafts together. Lumber is in great demand and the supply has to be unusually large. The West is perhaps the greatest lumber field in the United States.

NEWS OF THE DAY

FINGERPRINTS 1,000 YEARS AGO.

According to B. Laufer of the Feld Museum, Chicago, the taking of fingerprints as a means of identification was used by the Chinese and Japanese at least a thousand years ago. Writing in Science to controvert Sir William J. Herschel's claim to the credit for the invention, he quotes Rashid-eddin, the famous Persian historian, who described in 1303 the then ancient Chinese custom; Soleiman, an Arabian merchant, who wrote in A. D. 851 that in China creditors' bills were marked by the debtor with his fingers; and three contracts dated A. D. 782 and 786, both finger marked and bearing a note to the effect that the parties thereto had affixed the impressions of their fingers.

BOY OF 14 FIGHTS BULL.

Spain, land of toreadors, should hear of Albert Hosmer, fourteen, of Parkman, Ohio.

As a bull fighter Hosmer has just made a record, without weapons.

A bull owned by the boy's father charged Albert as he sought to feed the animal an apple. He grasped the bell ring of the maddened animal and leaped squarely on the bull's back. Roaring and snorting, the bull ran wildly around the lot. Then the animal stopped suddenly, and Albert was hurled to the ground.

Albert ran his fingers into the bull's nostrils and gripped tight. The bull fell to its knees. The boy let go, dashed to the fence and was on the other side before the bull charged.

NOVEL BALL PARK OPENING.

A huge plaster of Paris baseball, filled with sparkling liquid, took the place of a bottle of champagne, and a model of an ocean liner served in place of a real boat, in a most unusual christening which marked the recent opening of a ball park, laid out for teams representing large shipbuilding firms at Seattle, says the August *Popular Mechanics Magazine*. The ball park was placed on the home plate and the ship concealed behind a flag on top of the grandstand. When the flag was unfurled, revealing the ship, the latter was released from its support and began to slide down a wire which extended to the home plate. As the ship neared the ground it struck the big ball and broke it, spilling its contents on the diamond, which was thereupon turned over to the players representing the shipbuilding concern.

THE VALUE OF RIFLE SHOOTING.

The Army and Navy Gazette of London, commenting on the great value of good rifle shooting in

the present war says: "Happily the military authorities have not been misled by the results achieved by the big guns, the bombs, and the various missile-throwing trench weapons into imagining that the infantry soldier has ceased, or was likely to cease, to be primarily a rifleman, and the good work which was initiated before the war at Hythe and at Bisle, and at regimental rifle meetings, has been continued and expanded at the many musketry schools which have been established behind the front in France, where selected officers and men of our forces have been taught all that was to be got out of the service weapon. The result has been shown in the account we hear of the wonderful rifle practise made by our troops in the fighting around Bullecourt, reminding us of the stories that used to reach us during the retreat from Mons of how German mass attacks withered up under the fire of our infantry of the old army."

FEEDING STARVING DEER.

The deep snow on the divides between the rivers of Idaho sometimes attain to the height of thirteen or fourteen feet on top of the divides, thus driving all game, and especially the deer, to the lower regions, causing them to trample the snow in certain paths, or in places where these deer can obtain moss, grass or the branches of trees. During the winter and spring just passed the snow was extremely deep, and as it attained a greater depth the innocent animals were compelled to come nearer and nearer the rivers and civilization.

It so happened that a rich sawmill man who had befriended them, fed a few of them some hay, writes John Chambers in *Our Dumb Animals*. Word seemed to spread among them that here was protection and feed. A rancher, in cutting some wood, observed some deer within a few rods of him eating the boughs and buds of the tree on which he was working. On trying to scare one he observed that it was in a starved condition. He allowed it to eat with his cattle, but as others came he was obliged to protect his stock by giving them the hay he had harvested for them. However, he aroused the sympathy of the townspeople of St. Maries and soon loads of alfalfa were being sent to relieve the deer from starvation. Men were posted to keep the dogs and marauders from killing and disturbing them. In a district containing about twenty-four to thirty square miles, it was estimated that there were from two hundred to three hundred deer. As the game is fast disappearing in this country this is written in hopes that some Eastern lawmakers may have the true light and, if the time ever comes that they may assist in protecting game, they will do so without a feeling of fear from the Western people.

HUSTLING JOE BROWN

—OR—

THE BOY WHO KEPT THE TOWN CLOCK

By WILLIAM WADE

(A Serial Story)

CHAPTER XV (Continued).

"I thought there would be no harm in asking you, sir," said Joe, who felt that he was getting all balled up.

The leather man laughed.

"You will do," he said. "How nicely you wriggle out of it! Now tell me the exact situation at the Wapamsett works, and I will see what I can do."

"I can tell you very little, sir. Col. Redding believes that the works were fired by order of the trust, and that an attempt was made to burn him alive and to rob him."

"He is right. I saw the thing done."

"You!"

"Yes; even I, the crazy leather man. But for you he would have burned. I came out of the pattern shop determined that it should be so, but the sight of you two boys, in all the vigor of your youth, softened my heart. Know why?"

"No, sir."

"Because it reminded me of the days when Jim Redding and I were boys together, and I forgot for the moment how bitterly he had wronged me. That's why, and you can tell him so. He owes his life to you. But go on. The trusts got him tight by the short hair?"

"I think it has, sir. The works are to be closed, and it will kill the town of Reddington. All the life there is to it centers around the rifle works, as you probably know. Col. Redding has put it up to me to help him keep the town alive, and I am only trying to do the best I can."

"Right. I understand you are a smart boy, and nothing if not a hustler. I am disposed to help you, but it is for the sake of the town of Reddington, and not at all on account of the black, treacherous dog for whom it is named."

"I don't want to argue with you about the colonel, sir. I see you hate him. I suppose you have cause."

"As good cause as ever one man had in this world for hating another. But hatred destroys, and the law of love is the true principle to follow, for love builds up, creates. We will, therefore, forget my hatred. I appreciate all you say about the closing of the works killing Reddington. I am willing to help you keep the town alive."

"That's what I want, sir."

"But on condition."

"Well?"

"The condition is that you follow my directions implicitly. Will you promise me that?"

Joe might have hesitated but for the presence of Elsie Bender at the cave.

This gave him confidence.

"I'll give that promise," he said. "Like yourself, I do it for the sake of the town."

"Very well. Then return to Jim Redding and say that you saw me. Tell him that I was watching that night; that while he lay on the floor of the pattern shop, and while the backs of the two rascals who drugged him and helped to fire the works were turned, I secured the papers precisely as he robbed me under similar circumstances thirty years ago. Tell him I have them now hidden in this cave; hidden where neither he nor any other man can ever find them. Tell him that for the sake of Reddington, on the day you succeed in organizing a new company, and he assigns his present interest over to it under any terms which may suit him best, that I will place the papers in your hands, and that he can recover them in no other way. Then, when you have told him all that, ask him if he believes me to be a man of my word."

"I'll do all you say," said Joe. "But how in the world can I organize a new company? I am only a boy. I have no money. I——"

"Wait. There are ways and ways. In a few days' time I will bring or send to you a written plan of action. If you follow that out and hustle you will win. Perhaps in the end it may prove a good thing for yourself, in which case so much the better. Now go. I have talked longer with you than I have with any man in twenty years."

Thus saying, the leather man stretched himself at full length and buried his face in the bear skins.

Seeing that it was all over, Joe turned and hurried out of the cave.

"I've won out," he said to himself. "I know now what became of the papers, and if they can't be got one way, they can another. Now what comes next? If hustling is all that is required to keep the town alive, it will live sure."

CHAPTER XV.

WAITING AND SCHEMING.

Joe found Tom and Elsie Bender chatting pleasantly at the mouth of the cave.

"Well, I need not ask how you succeeded in your mission!" exclaimed Elsie, "your face shows that, and I am glad you are satisfied."

"I had no trouble talking with him," replied Joe.

"Which surprises you because you thought he was crazy," said Elsie. "He was so for many years, but, thank heavens, all that has passed, and there is now hope that he may some day take his proper place in the world. Wait here a few minutes, boys, and then we will return together. I shall be glad of your company, for, although I have pretended to the contrary, the mountaineers do frighten me a little. I won't be long."

She passed into the cave, and as soon as she was gone Tom began at Joe.

(To be continued.)

THE NEWS IN SHORT ARTICLES

AMERICAN EAGLES.

America is to have an air fleet of at least 22,000 machines, with an aviation army of 100,000 men. This new force will cost money, but it makes no difference how much it costs, so great are its possibilities as an influence on the result of the war. General Wood is quoted as having said the other day that the war cannot be won in the air, but it is certainly true that it cannot be won unless the Allies have at least an even break in the air. Let the German aviators drive the fliers of the Allies from the skies, and there will be very few gains made against German lines. Overwhelm the German fliers, and the German artillerists will have to fire largely at random, and they and the German infantrymen, German railroads, supply depots, headquarters, ammunition dumps, submarines nests, naval bases, may be subjected to a rain of high explosive bombs that cannot fail to assure victory for the Allies.

TRAIN CANNOT SCARE BEARS.

A log train on the Dahoga and Highland Railroad was held up for half an hour by two large black bears three miles south of Highland, Ga., recently. The train was moving slowly up the hillside when Engineer Johnson discovered two large bears, weighing about 300 pounds each, standing on the track a few hundred feet ahead. As the train approached the spot the bears failed to move.

Johnson pulled the bell cord, but the clang of the bell and the blast of the whistle failed to frighten the bruins, which stood and gazed admiringly at the approaching train. Knowing that it would be impossible to kill the bears at the speed his heavy train was moving, Johnson stopped the cars and watched the bears for about half an hour, when they slowly wandered off into the forest.

During the last month or so about ten bears have been seen by the train crews of the Dahoga and Highland Railroad, who report that bears were never so plentiful in that vicinity. One reason is the enormous chestnut crop, which will be the greatest in the last fifteen years. Hunters are looking forward to one of the greatest seasons in years for bear hunting.

SAILING SHIP HAS EARNED FORTUNE.

Three years ago the Chilean ship Puerto Montt, now lying in Port Townsend, Wash., changed hands for less than \$15,000, says the Seattle Times. Since then she has earned a fortune in freights, and now she changes hands again for \$125,000, more than eight times the price paid for her in June, 1914.

On her last voyage from the west coast to Tacoma and Du Pont, the Puerto Montt earned nearly \$20,000 gross for her owners.

Until her sale in June, 1914, the Puerto Montt was owned by Frenchmen. They sold her to R. Duncan & Co., a Chilean firm. Since then she has been a frequent visitor to Puget Sound, bringing nitrates and other cargo from the west coast and carrying western Washington lumber on the return voyage home. Duncan & Co. sold the vessel to other Chilean interests, delivery to be made in Port Townsend.

The Puerto Montt sale gives the latest development as regards the increase in the value of ocean bottoms since the fateful days of August, 1914, when Europe went singing to war. Since then her owners have cleared many times the price they paid for her, voyage after voyage netting figures close to that amount, and now in the sale of the ship they receive back \$2 for every \$1 given for her in 1914.

SEE GREAT WEALTH IN GOOSE CREEK OIL.

With one oil well bringing to the State a daily revenue of \$1,600 and with a prospect that within the next few weeks there will be at least twenty-five more producing wells on State-owned lands in the Goose Creek field, visions of enormous wealth from this source are being pictured by public officials here.

It will not be surprising, it is claimed by men who are familiar with the oil producing possibilities of Tabbs Bay, which is owned by the State of Texas, if the royalty which the State shall have obtained within the next year from this source amounts to \$14,000,000, or much more than will be necessary to pay the operating expenses of the State Government during the yearly period.

The recent bringing in of a well in the shallow water of Tabbs Bay with a flow of oil amounting to 12,000 barrels, leads to the belief on the part of practical oil men that the Goose Creek field is destined to develop into one of the biggest producing oil pools that has been discovered in the Gulf Coast region since the days of Spindletop.

The State has leased practically all of the area of the bay to different oil operators on a basis of one-eighth royalty of the value of all oil produced. There is room for probably 100 wells located at reasonable distances apart in the bay's area.

The State's one-eighth share of this production would amount to a little more than \$50,000 per day. The significance of the recent developments in the Goose Creek field lies in the fact that the big production was brought in at a greater depth of drilling than has heretofore been attempted. The flow evidently comes from an entirely distinct stratum. This is shown by the fact that the fluid of a higher grade than that obtained in the wells of lesser depth.

FACTS WORTH READING

A POUND OF HONEY.

When you eat a spoonful of honey, you have very little idea as to the amount of work and travel necessary to produce it. To make a pound of honey bees must take the nectar from 62,000 clover blossoms, and to do this requires 2,750,000 visits to the blossoms by the bees.

In other words, in order to collect enough nectar to make one pound of honey, a bee must go from hive to flower and back again 2,750,000 times. Then, when you think how far these bees sometimes fly in search of these clover fields, often one or two miles distant from the hive, you will begin to get a small idea of the number of miles one of the industrious little creatures must travel in order that you may have a pound of honey.

MAROONED TWO YEARS ON ISLE.

The Navy Department has made public the report of the American warship commander who rescued from Clippertown Island, in the Pacific, some time ago, three women and eight children who were the last remnants of a party of Mexicans who went to the island with Captain Ramon De Arnaud of the Mexican army to develop its guano deposits.

For military reasons the names of the American vessel and its commander were not made public. The commander's report shows that the women and children who were rescued had barely escaped starvation, while Captain De Arnaud lost his life at sea in the small boat in which he started out for help, and that other members of the party died of starvation and scurvy.

It was not until after the number of women and children left alive on the island had been reduced to the limits of the small supply of cocoanuts that the ravages of scurvy ceased. For more than two years these survivors were forced to subsist on the flesh and eggs of gannets and gulls, and occasionally fish.

The officers and crew of the warship raised a fund of \$200 for the relief of the refugees, who have been landed at a Mexican port.

STRANGE TREE BOWS ITS HEAD AT NIGHT.

From Simla, India, S. B. Banerjea sends the following to this magazine:

The educated public in Bengal is excited over the discovery of a palm tree which is exhibiting certain remarkable phenomena.

This tree is on a plot of land owned by an inhabitant of Faridpur. In the morning it stands erect, with its leaves outspread; but after sunset it bows its head, the leaves touching the ground, as if prostrating. This is witnessed every day.

Ignorant people have come to regard it as an abode of some god. Hundreds of men, women and children visit it daily and offer pujahs near it. It is even stated that many persons have been cured by offering pujah.

Sir Jagadish Nunder Bose, the renowned botanist, sent some of his assistants, with a self-recording apparatus specially constructed for the purpose, to discover the cause of the phenomenon. It has been found by dynamometric measurements that "the internal forces, whose periodic fluctuation causes this remarkable movement, are very great, the pull necessary to bring the tree down to its position of prostration exceeding several hundredweights."

Notwithstanding the thoroughly scientific explanation that this phenomenon is entirely natural, the owner of the tree is still making a good income from the pujah offerings of pilgrims.

OUR PATRIOTIC REBELS.

"During the first week in June the veterans who fought on the side of the South in the Civil War held their annual encampment in the city of Washington. This was the first time that the veterans of the Confederacy have come together in our capital city, which they tried so long and so hard to capture, and it was a remarkable and inspiring event. About 10,000 men wearing the gray, escorted by several thousand who wore the blue, marched along Pennsylvania avenue and were reviewed by the President," writes S. E. Forman in *St. Nicholas*. "In the line were many young soldiers now serving in the regular army, grandsons of those who fought for the Confederacy and of those who fought for the Union. The Stars and Bars of the Confederacy were proudly borne at the head of the procession, but by the side of the flags of the South waved the Stars and Stripes, the flag of a united country. As these flags were dipped in salute when passing the President, the banners fell together in a loving and friendly way. As the long line passed the reviewing-stand the old men in gray offered their services in the present war. 'We will go to France or anywhere you want to send us!' they shouted to the President. 'Call on us if the boys can't do it!' was a cry that was frequently heard. The spirit manifested by the veterans while in Washington showed plainly enough that there is no longer any bitterness in their hearts. 'We fought for four years to take this town,' said one of the old men, 'but now I thank God we did not get it.' Thus in many ways proof was given that the very men who fought against the Union in the Civil War are to-day its strongest supporters. 'We are all Americans now,' was the deeply cherished sentiment of every gray-clad veteran that attended this memorable reunion."

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 26, 1917.

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Good Current News Articles

When in 1842 the United States troops finally came off victorious in their bloody seven-years' war with the Seminoles, a portion of the tribe eluded capture and fled to the fastnesses of the Florida everglades, where they remained until the trouble had been partly forgotten by the whites. It is this remnant of the Seminole nation whose members now act as venders of souvenirs at Palm Beach.

In St. Moritz, six thousand feet up among the Alps, everybody wears a sweater. Skating, ski-ing, coasting, if you are not clad in a white sweater your dress is incorrect. The prettiest, quaintest thing there is the way all the dogs wear sweaters, too. A sweater is just the thing for a dog. Fitting tight, leaving the legs free, outlining the graceful body, it is at once comfortable and becoming. And in St. Moritz all the dogs wear sweaters. Bulldogs, dachshunds, collies, fox terriers, each capers about in the snow in a white sweater.

Something unique in the way of animal kindness, which also will net profits to the owner, has been discovered, north of Pierre, S. D., at the Pitlick ranch. An old mother cat has very charitably "adopted" and is raising a litter of skunks, and this gave the boys an idea, with the result that they search for the baby skunks, and bring them to the old kitty to raise, and she seems not to think them at all strange, but gives them every attention she would kittens of her own. The young skunks will be raised for their pelts, which bring a good price on the market.

With Norway building 3,000-ton ships of reinforced concrete, the proposal recently made to build ships of cast steel demands more than an ironical rejection. Recent improvements in metallurgy have left their mark upon the manufacture of cast steel, which to-day, because of its increased toughness and higher tensile strength, is being used for many

purposes for which a few decades ago it would have been considered an impossible material. We do not say that the thing can be done; but the study of the problem which is now being made is decidedly of interest. It is proposed to build the ships in sections and to weld the sections together electrically. Each section, whether for the bottom or the sides, would be cast with such ribs and other stiffening members as would be necessary. The sections are to be eight or ten feet in length, measured on the longitudinal axis of the ship. It is proposed to have on such section for the bottom and two others for the sides, a fourth section forming the deck frame-work. The designer believes that by the use of manganese supplied through the soldering the resulting electrically-welded joint would have 125 per cent. of the strength of the casting itself. It is also proposed to erect blast furnaces and open-hearth furnaces at the shipyards, and it is estimated that more tonnage could be turned out per month than by the ordinary methods.

Grins and Chuckles

"Did you have a good time at the Sunday school picnic, Jimmie?" "Betcher life I did. I fell in the lemonade barrel, and after that nobody wanted to drink any except me."

"Laziness is the beginning of trouble," remarked Bill's wife. "Yes," replied Bill. "I know that from experience. I used to loaf around your father's house before I married you."

"Ah, Madoline!" exclaimed the ardent swain, "your resplendent beauty sets my brain on fire!" "Never mind, Mr. Softleigh," said the fair one, soothingly, "I am sure it won't be much of a conflagration."

Mother—What's the little boy next door crying about? Tommie—Oh, he got hurt. Mother—He did, did he? You know I told you I'd punish you if you ever raised a hand to him. Tommie—Well, I didn't arise a hand to him, mother, I raised a foot.

The man and wife whose frequent quarrels had become a neighborhood scandal were severely reprimanded by the priest. "Why," said the priest, "the cat and dog that you have agree better than that." "May be," said Patrick, "but just tie them together and see what happens."

The newly-elected mayor of a small town was fond of show, so he did his best to be inducted into office in weather favorable to gay processions. At his suggestion this notice was put into the local papers three days before his installation: "On the occasion of the installation of the new mayor the fire brigade will be reviewed in the afternoon if it rains in the morning and in the morning if it rains in the afternoon."

ARTICLES OF ALL KINDS

ACTIVE AT AGE OF 107.

The oldest resident in the State of California lives in Broderick. He is Washington Jackson Brinson, and he resides at 510 G street. Brinson is 107 years old. He is a negro.

If his present state of health is any criterion Brinson will live several more years. He is as agile as a man half his years, and can do a day's work without suffering from the after effects. He attributes his good health to clean living.

The aged man has a vivid recollection of early history of the South, and has a fund of interesting stories about historical incidents.

LOST 121 POUNDS IN FEW WEEKS.

Dr. I. H. Magill of Seneca, weighed 316 pounds when he went on his vacation a few weeks ago. When he returned he weighed 195 pounds.

"The doctors told me I never would be able to get down to two hundred pounds," he said, "but I fooled them. It took persistent exercise. While I was in Texas I started walking a mile a day. That was all I could stand at first. But by the time I had finished my visit in San Diego I was walking eighteen miles a day without becoming in the least exhausted."

GROUNDHOG IS BACK HOME.

Hezzie Sisk of Dalton, Ky., is the owner of a groundhog that is now old enough to retire to private life. About twenty years ago Mr. Sisk's son Sam found a young groundhog pig, took it home and that fall it hibernated. It came out next spring and soon was missing.

Sight had been lost of the animal, but about two months ago the same hog turned up again and went to the same quarters where it was reared, and is still with the family. Mr. Sisk says there is no doubt that it is the very same groundhog that strayed off from home a number of years ago. It is gentle and seems to have made up its mind to die among its former friends.

GET \$2,050,000 WINDFALL.

Two million and fifty thousand dollars, distributed in six Chicago banks, most of it in bills of large denominations, have been added to the fortune of the late John K. Stewart, manufacturer of automobile accessories.

Existence of this money was unknown to the heirs, daughters, five and fifteen years old, respectively, or their guardians until revealed in the Probate Court. The inheritance tax on the additional treasure amounts to \$43,000.

Mr. Stewart's estate was probated in June, 1916,

and tax was paid on \$4,000,000. Mrs. Stewart died soon afterward in North Carolina. She intrusted, in addition to the \$4,000,000, currency totalling \$690,000 to Leander H. Lachance, her nephew. He brought it to Chicago and tax was assessed upon it. He is guardian of the children.

DOG WITH RAILROAD PASS.

There is a dog named Roxie, and on his collar is a brass tablet setting forth that he is an employe of the Long Island Railroad, and instructing all the railway men to let him travel on the trains. This pass was given to the bull terrier by order of the president of the company. One day he saw a guard trying to kick Roxie out of his private car. When the president asked what was the cause of the trouble between the dog and the guard, he was told of the animal's fondness for traveling on the trains, and that he could not be kept out of them. The president's interest being aroused in the dog he was made welcome by him to his private car, and the pass was issued to prevent any more interference with Roxie's traveling.

For fifteen years, according to the American Boy, Roxie has spent all his time in railway traveling, day and night. Curiously enough, he never makes a return journey from a terminus with the same train. After he has spent a little time with one of his favored acquaintances, he will take it into his head to meet a certain train. As soon as it stops at the station Roxie jumps on the train and curls himself up on a vacant seat, or, if there is none to be had, he quietly dozes on the floor until he arrives at his destination. The moment the name of the station is called out he jumps up and makes for the door. After a visit of what he thinks is the proper time, he gets into another train and goes to to another station. Sometimes he goes farther along the line, and sometimes he returns in the direction in which he came. Roxie has been at every station along the entire railway many times; but he has never been known to go the entire length of the line in one journey.

He enters the president's private car with the utmost assurance that he is welcome there, or, indeed, wherever an official of the railway is to be found. He does not care very much for mixing with the passengers. Very few of them have even been able to make friends with him. He seldom barks, and he avoids trouble of every kind. He has a will of his own, and is not slow in showing it. Nothing induces him to leave a train until he arrives at the station he desires. Many persons have tried to win his friendship with eatables, but failed. He can get all he wants to eat and drink at any town on the railway system.

AUTOMATIC COPYING PENCIL.



The importance of carrying a good reliable pencil need not be dwelt upon here. It is an absolute necessity with us all. The holder of this pencil is beautifully nicked with grooved box-wood handle, giving a firm grip in writing; the pencil automatically supplies the lead as needed while a box of these long leads are given with each pencil. The writing of this pencil is indelible the same as ink, and thus can be used in writing letters, addressing envelopes, etc. Bills of account or invoices made out with this pencil can be copied the same as if copying ink was used. It is the handiest pencil on the market; you do not require a knife to keep it sharp; it is ever ready, ever safe, and just the thing to carry.

Price of pencil, with box of leads complete, only 10c.; 3 for 25c.; one dozen 90c. postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d Street, N. Y.

POCKET SAVINGS BANK.

A perfect little bank, handsomely nickel plated. Holds just five dollars (50 dimes). It cannot be opened until the bank is full, when it can be readily emptied and relocked, ready to be again refilled. Every parent should see that their children have a small savings bank, as the early habit of saving their dimes is of the greatest importance. Habits formed in early life are seldom forgotten in later years. Price of this little bank, 10c.; 3 for 25c., mailed, postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d Street, N. Y.

IMITATION BED BUGS.

This toy is an exact imitation of the friendly little fellow who shares your bed, eats out of your hand or leg and who accepts your humble hospitality even without an invitation. The fact that he also insists on introducing all his friends and family circle, sometimes makes him most unpopular with the ladies; most every woman you know would have seven kinds of fits if she saw two, or even one, of these imitations on her bedspread. Six are contained in a transparent envelope. Price, 10c. by mail.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

LINK THE LINK PUZZLE.



The sensation of the day. Pronounced by all, the most baffling and scientific novelty out. Thousands have worked at it for hours without mastering it, still it can be done in two seconds by giving the links the proper twist, but unless you know how, the harder you twist them the tighter they grow. Price, 6c.; 3 for 15c.; one dozen, 50c., by mail, postpaid.

FRANK SMITH, 383 Lenox Ave., N. Y.

THE HELLO PUZZLE



Can you get the ring off? This puzzle is the latest creation of Yankee ingenuity. Apparently it is the easiest thing in the world to remove the ring from the block, but it takes hours of study to discover the trick, unless you know how it is done. Price by mail, postpaid, 10c.; 3 for 25c.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.



The Bottle Imp.—The peculiarity of this little bottle is that it cannot be made to lie down, and yet by simply passing the hand over it, the performer causes it to do so.

This trick affords great amusement, and is of convenient size to carry about. Price 10c. each by mail, postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

THE CANADIAN WONDER CARD TRICK.



Astonishing, wonderful, and perplexing! Have you seen them? Any child can work them, and yet, what they do is so amusing that the sharpest people on earth are fooled. We cannot tell you what they do, or others would get next and spoil the fun. Just get a set and read the directions. The results will startle your friends and utterly mystify them. A genuine good thing if you wish to have no end of amusement.

Price 10c. by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

GOLD PLATED COMBINATION SET.

Gold plated combination set, with turquoise stone. Price 10c. each by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.



STAR AND CRESCENT PUZZLE.

The puzzle is to separate the one star from the linked star and crescent without using force. Price, 10 cents; 3 for 25 cents, by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF Novelty Co., 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

MYSTERIOUS PLATE LIFTER.

Made of fine rubber, with bulb on one end and inflator at other. Place it under a table cover, under plate or glass, and bulb is pressed underneath, object rises mysteriously; 40 inches long. Price 25c., postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

GREAT BURGLAR PUZZLE.



The latest and most fascinating puzzle ever placed on the market. Patented May 30. It consists of four revolving dials, each dial containing 16 figures, 64 figures in all. To open the safe these dials must be turned around until the figures in each of the 16 columns added together total 40.

The puzzle is made on the plan of the combination lock on the large iron safes that open on a combination of figures. Persons have been known to sit up all night, so interested have they become trying to get each column to total 40 in this fascinating puzzle. With the printed key which we send with each puzzle the figures can be set in a few minutes so as to total 40 in each column.

Price 15 cents; mailed, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre St., B'klyn, N. Y.

THE ELK HEAD PUZZLE.

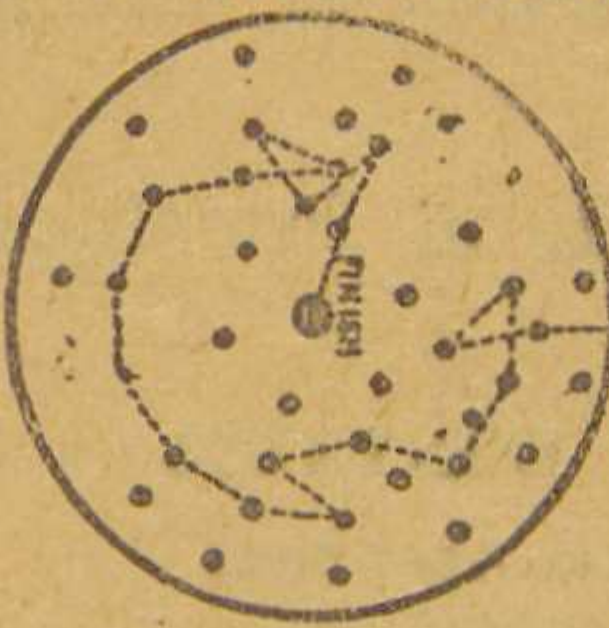


Just out and one of the most fascinating puzzles on the market. The stunt is to separate the antlers and rejoin them. It looks easy, but try it and you will admit that it is without exception the best puzzle you have ever seen. You can't leave it alone.

Made of silvered metal. Price 12c.; 3 for 30c., sent by mail, postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d Street, N. Y.

THE SPIDER WEB PUZZLE.



A very interesting little puzzle. It consists of a heavily nicked plate and brass ring. The object is to get the ring from the side to the center and back. This is very hard, but we give directions making it easy. Price, 10 cents each, by mail, postpaid.

FRANK SMITH, 383 Lenox Ave., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC MIND READING.



Wonderful! Startling! Scientific! You hand a friend a handsome set of cards on which are printed the names of the 28 United States Presidents. Ask him to secretly select a name and hold the card to his forehead and think of the name. Like a flash comes the answer "Lincoln, Washington," or whatever name he is thinking of. The more you repeat it the more puzzling it becomes. With our outfit you can do it anywhere, any time, with anybody. Startle your friends. Do it at the next party or at your club and be the lion of the evening. This was invented by a famous magician.

Price, with complete set of cards and full instructions, 12 cents, mailed, postpaid.

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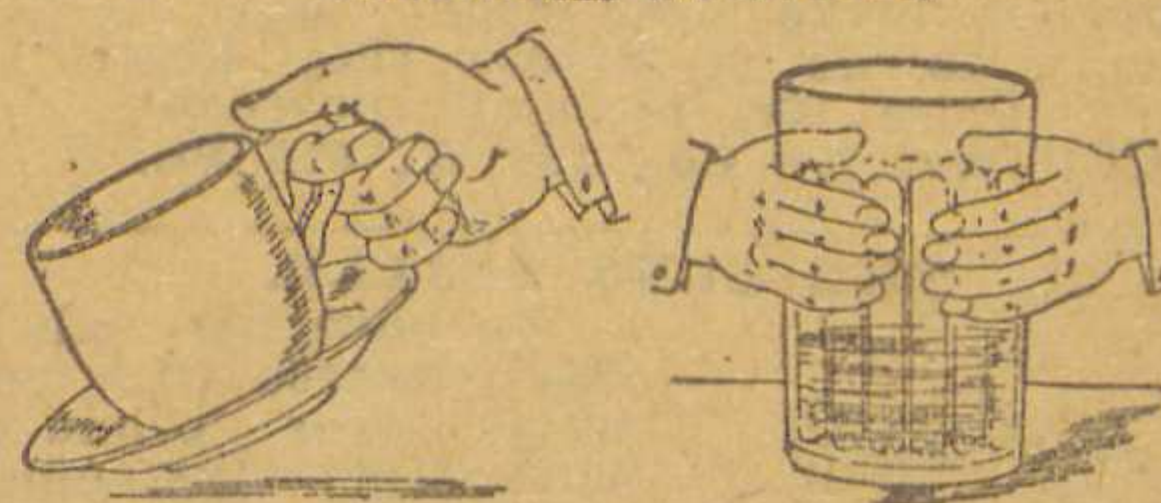
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As Itch powder, Cachoo and Bombs are unobtainable, we cannot accept orders for less than One Dollar's worth of an assortment. They can be sent by express only, on which we will prepay the charges.

WOLFF Novelty Co., 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

RUBBER SUCKER.



Rubber Vacuum Suckers

The latest novelty out! Dishes and plates will stick to the table, cups to the saucers like glue. Put one under a glass and then try to lift it. You can't. Lots of fun. Always put it on a smooth surface and wet the rubber. Many other tricks can be accomplished with this novelty.

Price, 12 cts. each by mail, postpaid.

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GOOD LUCK GUN FOB.

The real western article carried by the cowboys. It is made of fine leather with a highly nicked buckle. The holster contains a metal gun, of the same pattern as those used by all the most famous scouts. Any boy wearing one of these fobs will attract attention. It will give him an air of western romance. The prettiest and most serviceable watch fob ever made. Send for one to-day. Price 20 cents each by mail postpaid.

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SECOR SPARKLER.



Hold discs in each hand and twist the strings by swinging the toy around and around about 30 times. Then move the hands apart, pulling on the discs and causing the strings to untwist. This will rotate the wheel and cause the sparks to fly. The continued rotation of the wheel will again twist the strings. When this twisting commences slacken the strings slightly until they are full twisted, then pull.

Price 25 cts. each by mail, postpaid.

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BLACK-EYE JOKE.



New and amusing joker. The victim is told to hold the tube close to his eye so as to exclude all light from the back, and then to remove the tube until pictures appear in the center. In trying to locate the pictures he will receive the finest black-eye you ever saw. We furnish a small box of blackening preparation with each tube, so the joke can be used indefinitely. Those not in the trick will be caught every time. Absolutely harmless. Price by mail 15c. each; 3 for 25c.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

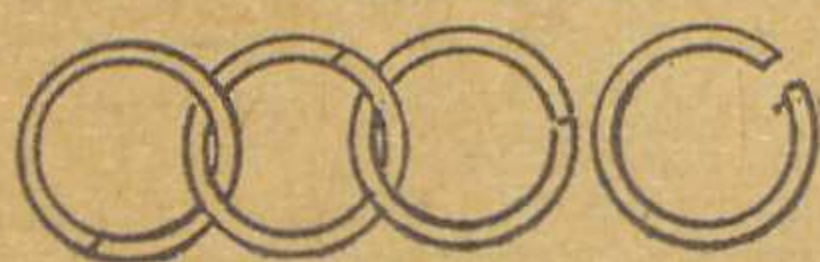


THE KAZOO.

Made in the exact shape of a submarine. With this comical little instrument you can give a bride and groom one of the finest serenades they ever received. Or, if you wish to use it as a ventriloquist, you will so completely change your voice that your best friend will not recognize it. Price, 12c, by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF Novelty Co., 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

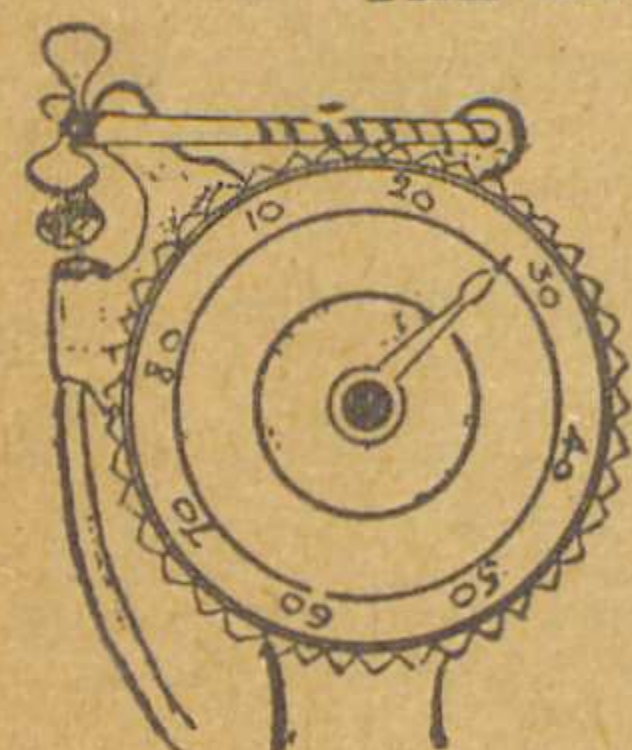
MAGIC LINK PUZZLE.



A number of rings. The scheme is to link them together just exactly the same way magicians link their hoops. It looks dead easy. But we defy anybody to do it unless they know the secret. Price 10c, by mail, postpaid.

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THE LUNG TESTER.



We have here one of the greatest little novelties ever produced. With this instrument you can absolutely test the strength of your lungs. It has an indicator which clearly shows you the number of pounds you can blow. Lots of fun testing your lungs. Get one and see what a good blower you are. Price 15c, by mail, postpaid.

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THE RUBBER DAGGER.



On account of the war we have substituted this novelty for the Magic Dagger. It is eight inches in length, made to look exactly like a steel weapon and would deceive almost anybody at whom you might thrust it. But as the blade is made of rubber, it can do no injury. Price 15c, by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 1815 Centre Street, Brooklyn, New York.

NUT AND BOLT PUZZLE.



A very ingenious puzzle, consisting of a nut and bolt with a ring fastened on the shank, which cannot be removed unless the nut is removed. The question is how to remove the nut. Price, 15c, by mail, postpaid.

FRANK SMITH, 383 Lenox Ave., N. Y.



The simplest trick out. All you have to do is to get the cigarette into Charlie's mouth. Ah, ha! But can you do it? We doubt it. Anyhow, you might try. It's a safe bet your friends can't work it. The trick is a stationary head and a loose cigarette in a metal box with a glass top. If you don't get one you'll regret it, that's all. Price 12c, by mail, postpaid.

C. BEHR, 150 W. 62d St., New York City.

THE QUESTION PUZZLE.



Two links in the form of question marks, fastened together at the top. The object is to disengage one link from the other. It cannot be done without the directions. Price 10c, by mail, postpaid, with directions.

WOLFF Novelty Co., 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

THE MODERN DANCERS.



These dancers are set in a gilt frame, the size of our engraving. By lighting a match and moving it in circular form at the back they can be made to dance furiously, the heat from the match warming them up. If you want to see an up-to-date tango dance send for this pretty charm.

Price, 15 cents, or 3 for 40 cents, sent by mail, postpaid. Wolff Novelty Co., 168 W. 23d St., N. Y.

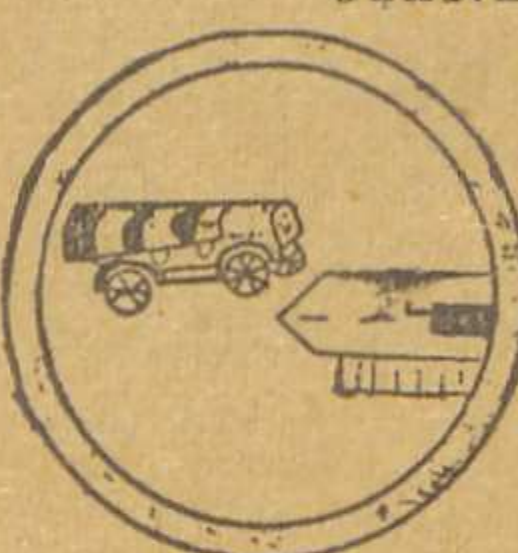
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A very handsome fountain pen case to which is attached a pocket holder neatly made of metal and highly nickel-plated. When your friend desires the use of your pen and gets it, he is very much astonished when he removes the cap by the sudden and loud noise of the explosion that occurs, and yet a little paper cap does it all. Price, 35c, by mail, postpaid.

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JITNEY BUS GAME.



A circular metal box with a glass top. Inside is a tiny garage fixed at one side and a loose traveling little Ford. It requires an expert to get the swiftly moving auto into the garage. This one grabs your interest, holds it, and almost makes you wild when you find after repeated trials how hard it is to do the trick. Price 12c, by mail, postpaid.

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